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By D. W. STEVENS.









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# THE JAMES BOYS AT BAY:

OR,

## SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE'S TRIUMPH.

By D. W. STEVENS,

Author of "Thirty Days With the James Boys; or, A Detective's Wild Chase in Kentucky," etc., etc., etc.

## CHAPTER I.

## THE DEAD STEED.

"HARK away, my gallant Lightfoot!"

The ringing beat of iron shod hoofs rang like the notes from an anvil on the hard road, and echoed among the tree tops.

It was a long, seemingly an endless road, leading through that old forest in the State of Missouri. Missouri is noted for its vast forests, as well as broad prairies. There still exist in that state, although the hand of civilization is changing its features, great forests, in which a traveler may become lost and wander about until he dies of starvation. It is one of those vast forests to which we call the reader's attention.

A man mounted on a horse that shows great fatigue, is urging the poor, tired beast forward at a rate of speed which indicates the necessity of haste.

"Poor Lightfoot," says the rider, in full sympathy with his steed. "'Tis hard to drive you so. Oh, if I could but rally my brave boys about me, we would turn on the human bloodhounds and make them rue the day they ever became our pursuers."

Then he checked the horse for a single moment, and bent an ear to the road he had but just come over.

Clear and distinct in the distance came the clatter of hoofs ringing on the air.

"They come, they still come," said the horseman. "They thirst for my blood."

His cheeks were pale as death, his blue lips dry, parched and bloodless, while his cold, steel gray eyes seemed starting from their sockets. Again he started up the weary horse, and with evident alarm listened to his heavy, uncertain breathing.

"He can't go far," said the horseman, shaking his head sadly. "It's a shame after his saving my life so many times that I should now be compelled to kill him."

The horse was reeking with perspiration, the dull, heavy eye, trembling flank and quivering nostril all indicated what an effort it was for him to move. There was a tender sympathy which we might say amounted to love between master and horse. What man is worthy of being called a horseman who does not love his

noble steed? This man was every inch a horseman.

Since early dawn he had rode this self-same steed.

Not at a jogging trot, a pleasant canter or gentle gallop, but at the top of his speed.

Should we give the distance that that horse had covered in that single day, yes, in the last ten hours, the reader might hold his breath or turn away from this page with a look of incredulity.

For ten hours had Lightfoot borne his master bravely on, and every hour represented more than ten miles.

Lightfoot was a blooded bay, a thoroughbred Kentucky steed, one of those wonderful horses noted for prodigious speed and endurance.

Those pursuers—fully a score—had had changes of horses a dozen times during the long chase, but poor Lightfoot had outrun them all. At last, as the shadows lengthened, and the sun dipped low in the western horizon, they plunged into that vast forest where the fugitive hoped to shake off his pursuers.

But that hope was in vain.

They came on, on, steadily on with all the unerring precision of sleuth hounds, and seemed as if they would not be shaken off.

"It's twenty miles to Lockport," said the fugitive to himself, "and it will be dark ere we reach that place."

Then he bent low in the saddle and listened to the irregular, heavy breathing of the horse, and shaking his head he said:

"He can't make it."

This conclusion was reached and expressed in a feeling of despair. There was a bitter ring in the tone of voice and a cold steel-like glitter in the eyes as he added:

"Well, let 'em come. We can die, Lightfoot. We can die, but as we go down to the dark unknown world there will be company."

Then he once more glanced back along that long winding road in his rear. But the trees and bushes grew too close to the sides of it, and the road was too crooked for him to see any great distance, but he could hear the regular tramp of hoofs and knew they must be nearer.

"They gain on us, Lightfoot."

Poor Lightfoot, once the pride of the turf, and

who had never been beaten by the best blood of the blue-grass regions of Kentucky, was now running his last race.

He seemed to realize it, for he breathed heavily, and struggled hard to give that gay toss of his head with which he had so often greeted his master's voice.

But Lightfoot's moments were numbered, and no one knew that better than his rider.

He loved the horse. Loved him as only a true master loves his steed, and it broke his heart to see him being driven to death.

"Oh, Lightfoot, good Lightfoot, old boy, could we have gone down in battle side by side, and mingled our blood on the plains, I would not complain, but to have to slay you in this manner—" he stopped, checked by his own emotions. "But he gives his life for me."

Not two miles in the rear of this fugitive came the score of pursuers. They were all well-armed, bold man hunters, who had chased their intended victim for hours with a determination that was sure of success.

At the head of the procession rides the well-known Sheriff Timberlake, a man who has long been noted for his daring and persistence in following up the James Boys.

"He is bound to give in soon, boys," cries Timberlake. "He is bound to yield soon, for he can never cross this forest. I know he will never cross it."

"Well, I hope he'll call a halt," answered one of Timberlake's band. "I am all used up."

"So am I!"

"So am I!"

And thus answered half a dozen of the cavalcade.

"Used up! Why, men, haven't you got fresh horses?" cried Timberlake.

"Yes, we all have fresh horses, but we haven't fresh riders, Timberlake," answered Dick McCabe.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean when a man runs down half a dozen horses, a man's about ready to take a rest himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Goff, and a desperate, hard laugh it was. "Timberlake don't seem to think a man should ever get tired."

"Timberlake is an extraordinary man," put in



George Nelson, one of the cavalcade on the sheriff's posse. "He never tires, and he very naturally thinks no one else should."

"He's not a mau."

"What is he?"

"A machine."

"I believe you," Bill Fox answered. "By George, he looks as fresh as when we started."

"Well, boys, keep up a little while longer and we'll have him. He can't go much further."

"He can, but his horse can't. Jesse James is no ordinary man. He's as wily and as enduring as Timberlake himself, but—"

"But he only has one horse," put in Timberlake.

"There you hit it."

Then for a few moments the silence was broken only by the rapid thunder of hoofs or the occasional clash of a steel-toed shoe against a flinty stone.

The somber shadows were gathering in the dark forest, and as the steel-toed shoes struck the flinty stones, showers of angry sparks were emitted.

"It will soon be night," observed McCabe.

"Yes and we had better overhaul Jesse James before nightfall, or he'll crawl off in the woods."

"Boys," said George Nelson, a gray-headed, grizzled-bearded old veteran.

His horse stumbled at this moment and prevented Uncle George, as he was called, from finishing his sentence.

He jerked his horse's head high in the air, and gave him a keen cut with his whip to make the animal more careful, and galloped on overtaking his companions.

"Well, what were you going to say, Uncle George?" asked McCabe.

"I was about to say when this infernal beast stumbled, that when we caught up with Jesse James we would have to carry some of our boys away on litters."

"You mean he'll fight, Uncle George?"

"That's just it."

"Well, I hope he will."

"You do?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why, Dick McCabe, are you fond of being killed or seeing other people killed?"

"No, I can't say that I am, but I think either being killed or seeing others killed is preferable to such long rides as this."

"Dick's right."

"You bet he is."

Timberlake was a little ahead of the others. He was a silent, grim man in a chase, seldom speaking unless addressed or it became necessary to utter some word of command or encouragement to his men.

He turned slightly in the saddle and said:

"Come on, boys."

"Are we close to him, Timberlake?" asked Uncle George.

"Yes."

"How does he know?" asked Dick.

"Who? He—Timberlake?"

"Yes. How does Timberlake know more about it than we do. We are near to the front and can see as far as he can."

"He knows, because he can hear like a fox," said Uncle George. "Timberlake knows what he's about."

Timberlake possessed remarkably keen faculties.

He scented game near, and turned to speak a word of caution to his men, when suddenly a keen, clear whip-crack like report cut the air, and a bullet came humming through the air within an inch or two of the daring sheriff's head.

"Woah!"

He checked his horse so suddenly as to bring him almost to his haunches, and the whole cavalcade came to a halt.

"What is it?" cried Dick.

"A shot."

"Who fired it?"

The truth was that the shot was so near and so unexpected, that our cavalcade of pursuers did not know who had fired it.

Even Timberlake was astounded at the bold, unexpected attempt at his life.

"Who fired it?" Dick repeated.

"Jesse James," answered Uncle George.

"Where?"

"From the woods."

Dick was looking for the smoke of the shot, and soon saw a thin, pale blue wreath of smoke ascending up from the branches of a tree.

Timberlake's posse were all handy with the pistol, and in less than three seconds' time after the shot had been fired, and long before the echoes of the report had ceased to reverberate

among the hills and tree tops, every man had a revolver in his hand.

But they could see no object to shoot at, and they knew too much to fire at random.

"Maybe Timberlake is hit—he sits so still and rigid," whispered Tom Goff.

Uncle George spurred his horse alongside the brave sheriff and asked:

"Are you hit, Timberlake—speak up and tell me if you are hit or not!"

"I am not hurt," was the answer.

"Well, I thought you were. What are you doing?"

"Trying to sight the scoundrel."

"Was it Jess?"

"Of course. He is run to earth."

It did not seem to occur to Timberlake that he was endangering his own life by sitting there bolt upright in the saddle.

"I say, Timberlake, he may shoot agin," said Uncle George, cautiously.

"I wish he would, for then I might get his locality, and I'll bore him through. Remember, boys," he added to his men, "we get as much for Jesse James dead as we do for him alive, and you need not hesitate a moment about putting him out of the way."

"You bet we won't be squeamish."

"Now look sharp. He is right ahead, among those bushes. Deploy and we'll charge right down on 'im."

"Look out!" cautioned Uncle George.

"Yes—don't let 'im give us the slip," put in Timberlake.

"Jesse's a dead shot."

"So are we."

"He'll get some of us—"

"But we'll get him yet, see if we don't."

"It won't be much satisfaction to a fellow with a bullet in his brain to know that he has killed Jesse James."

But the men were not cowards, and they deployed and charged on the bush according to command.

"Look sharp!" roared Timberlake. "Don't give him an opportunity to escape."

"There he is."

Bang!

One more nervous than his companions blazed away into the bushes hoping to hit the desperate outlaw whom they had at last succeeded in running to earth.

"Forward!"

"Charge!"

With a thundering rush the cavalcade pushed on, and leaped their horses into the particular thicket in which the bandit king of America was supposed to be concealed.

The blue smoke from the pistol ascended upward, and the pursuers looked about in vain for Jesse James.

"He is not here," gasped Uncle George.

"Where is he?" asked Timberlake angrily.

"Gone."

"Where has he gone?"

"In the earth."

"Melted in air."

"Nonsense," cried Timberlake, who had not the least particle of superstition about him.

"Then where is he?" demanded Dick McCabe.

"I'd swear I saw the shot from his pistol come right out of the brush."

Timberlake was on the ground, and bent his ear close to it to listen.

"I'll bet he's not far," put in Uncle George.

"It's some trick of Jesse James—oh, I know him. Look out for him, I tell you, or he'll be putting in a volley of bullets into us before we know it."

"Silence!" whispered the sheriff.

"Aye, do you see him."

"Hark!"

Timberlake's keen ear heard the rapid tramp of footsteps, as some one ran nimbly away.

Fainter and fainter they grew and he was unable to tell which course they went.

Suddenly they died away in the distance and stopped, where, he could not determine.

He was rising from the ground, about as much dissatisfied as it is possible for one to be, when suddenly a new sound sharper and more distinct fell on his ear.

"Aha! I have it. He has mounted his horse and is now riding away!" cried Timberlake, starting up and leaping in his saddle.

His manner spoke volumes to the posse of men who were with him, and they all instinctively knew that the game was near at hand. The air was full of polished barrels and the hard set features and glaring eyes of the determined men, gave them more the appearance of wild beasts, than of human beings.

"Where is he?" Uncle George hoarsely whispered.

"Back to the road," was the command.

And back to the road wheeled the wild cavalcade. The bushes and weeds swept beneath the legs and hoofs of so many horses like rock beaten foam on the breakers, the horses snorting and men excited.

Jesse James had indicated by that shot, that there was to be no surrender, and every man knew full well just what was to be expected.

It was to be a battle to the death, and never rushed a pack of hounds more greedily upon the game than those bold, desperate men. The wild stag might expect as much mercy of hounds as Jesse James could expect from the bold desperate posse which followed Sheriff Timberlake.

No one realized his position more than the bandit himself.

He had adopted the ruse which we have just described for producing a check on the part of his enemies, and giving Lightfoot a chance to rest for a moment, hoping, yet it was a faint hope, that he might be able to double on his enemies, and avoid them until the friendly shadows of night should spread the dark mantle about him and protect him from them. Having fired the shot at Timberlake as we have seen, Jesse ran nimbly along the forest path worn smooth by wild animals, and reached the spot where he had left his horse.

Poor Lightfoot stood with drooping head and tail, the fire was gone from his noble eye, and his heavy breathing and quivering flank alone testified that he was alive.

Jesse drew from his pocket a bottle containing some brandy, and extracting the cork, said:

"I'll try it once more."

Taking the drooping head on his shoulder he thrust the neck of the bottle in the horse's mouth and poured the remainder, almost a quarter of a pint, down the throat of his steed.

"There, that's the last drop!" he cried, throwing away the empty bottle. "If that don't rouse him to flight, why nothing will."

Lightly leaping in the saddle the bandit king again urged his weary horse to a gallop.

It was the ring of his hoofs which reached Timberlake's ears, and told him that Jesse James was again in the saddle.

The fiery liquid seemed to stimulate the horse.

He leaped forward at a brisker pace than before, and once more his fine clean limbs, like some well regulated machinery, began to play, and the horse flies with the speed of the whirlwind.

"Ho, ho! he is fresh now. Oh, we'll beat them yet, good Lightfoot. Keep this up but thirty minutes longer and we are safe," said the exultant fugitive.

Jesse gazed at the setting sun. It had long since sank beneath the tree tops, and the vast forest, save the tops of trees here and there, which were tipped with the fires of departing day, was all somber and gloom. The sober shades of twilight had already begun to steal over the earth, and night would soon follow.

Jesse was jubilant. But a moment ago he was ready to despair; now he saw escape at hand, and would soon be free from the bloodhounds on his trail.

The reaction made him joyous. Had he dared he would have sang to the woods and trees about him. But no; his voice must not give forth the inexpressible joy he feels.

But hold! what is that?

His horse staggers.

Oh Heaven, what a piteous groan bursts from the dying beast. He has nobly done his part, but his race is run. The knees tremble, he totters feebly.

That last outburst of speed was but the spasmodic effort of a dying beast, and poor Lightfoot can go no further.

"Great Heaven, Lightfoot, have I killed you?" cried Jesse James, leaping from the saddle as his horse sank to the ground.

"Oh Lightfoot—noble Lightfoot, the best of all steeds—you have given your life for your master!" cried Jesse, embracing the neck of the dying steed.

The poor beast uttered a groan, and the blood gushed in a torrent from his nostrils and mouth. He stretched out his limbs, a shudder ran through the beautiful frame, and the poor beast was dead.

The sunlight faded from the tree tops and crested hills, the shades of night grew deeper, and loud on the evening air rang out the roar of hoofs.

As Jesse James stood with arms folded and tear-streaming eyes, gazing at his dead steed, Timberlake and posse were coming frightfully near.



## CHAPTER II.

## THE HERMIT OF THE WOODS.

THE sounds of thundering hoofs were borne to his ears, and the bandit king was suddenly recalled to his perilous situation.

Quick as a flash of angry lightning he snatched a pistol in each hand from his belt and turned his face down that dark road over which he had so recently come.

"Come on!" he hissed defiantly. "Come on. I want to die. Oh, I want to die by the side of poor Lightfoot, who died for me. Come on, I am ready and waiting, and I swear that half of your infernal human bloodhounds shall die with me," roared the exasperated outlaw.

"Young man," said a voice at his side.

Jesse turned, and for an instant amazement held him dumb. Before him stood an old man with long, white beard.

His head was bald, and his skin seemed wrinkled with age, though his form was straight and supple as a youth's.

"Who are you?" cried Jesse.

"The Hermit."

"Hermit?"

"Hermit of the woods."

"What do you want?"

"I came for you."

Jesse laughed a low reckless laugh, and pointing with one of his pistols in the direction the horsemen were coming, said:

"They, too, are coming for me."

"I know it."

"I have these for them," holding up his pistols. "Do you want a dose from one of them?"

"Nonsense, young man—I am your friend."

"How do I know that?"

"I can prove it."

"How?"

"I came to save you."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"From those?"

"You are right. I came to save you, and I'll do it."

"How can you?"

"Come with me, and I will show you a means of escape," said the hermit.

"I don't know," Jesse hesitatingly answered.

"I really don't know whether I dare trust you or not."

"Why do you doubt me?"

"I don't know you."

"Yet if I were not your friend I would not come here as I do to try to save you from death. The wolves—the bloodhounds are coming here to rend you to pieces, and I have come to save you—"

"But Lightfoot—poor Lightfoot!" sighed Jesse James, turning his eyes toward his horse.

Jesse's strong emotions over his dead horse may seem strained and unnatural to one who knows nothing of the attachment of a master to his steed. But to the horseman who knows what it is to lose a horse when it has saved his life, Jesse's grief was natural.

"Come on, young man; he is dead. You can do him no good. Come on! Come on!" the hermit whispered, pulling Jesse's arm.

"Oh, I ought to stay and avenge him. Let me stay and avenge the death of my gallant horse."

"No—no; come on."

And partly by coaxing and partly by gentle coercion he forced Jesse James from the scene, down into the path which led through the thicket and soon out of sight.

The thunder of hoofs drew nearer and nearer, until Timberlake and his posse at last burst on the little valley where poor Lightfoot lay just where he had fallen.

The twilight shades had been constantly deepening, and they only saw a dark object lying on the ground.

"Aha—there he is!" cried the sheriff.

Bang!

It was Dick McCabe.

The nervous, quick fellow had his pistol ready, and at sight of the spot where Jesse was supposed to be blazed away.

"Hold up, Dick!" cried Uncle George.

"Why?"

"He may surrender."

"More likely let into us fellows."

"Surrender!" roared Timberlake.

There came no answer.

They approached the spot somewhat warily, holding their revolvers ready cocked in their hands.

Timberlake was in the advance of the others, and when he was near enough to see that the dead steed was all that lay in the road, he turned to his companions and said:

"He's not here."

"Not there?"

"No."

"Then what's that dark object?" asked Dick McCabe.

"A dead horse."

"A dead horse?" whispered another.

"It must be his horse," ventured Uncle George Nelson.

"I'll bet it is."

"Yes, it's Lightfoot," said Timberlake, bending over the dead animal and examining it.

"Yes, my bullet killed it," said McCabe, who was very anxious to take some credit upon himself.

"Your bullet, indeed," laughed Uncle George.

"Why, you never shot at that horse."

"What did I shoot at, then?" McCabe asked, somewhat indignantly.

"Nothing."

"And he hit it," put in Tom Goff.

"Shut your mouths."

"Silence!" commanded Timberlake.

Never were soldiers better disciplined than the posse commanded by Timberlake. He had but to utter a command and it was obeyed.

In a moment every man was silent.

"Dismount!"

They all dismounted and drew a little nearer the great sheriff.

It was growing darker, and at a few rods distance one could not distinguish friend from foe.

"Now, boys," said Timberlake, in a low, earnest tone of voice, which indicated that he understood the situation they were in and knew that it would require an extra amount of shrewdness to accomplish their purpose. "This bay has not been dead five minutes. Jesse James is here—right here within pistol shot of us, and I know it. If we speak in even ordinary conversation he will hear what we say. He is well armed, desperate and dangerous, but we have got to take him. Be cautious, yet brave. Be prudent or you may kill one another. Remember we are twenty to one, yet he does possess one advantage, and that is, that he has all to gain and nothing to lose. Scatter out in twos, and be careful. Remember if you see a man going singly it is Jesse, and shoot him down before he shoots you. Be sure he is alone, though. If you meet two men together you must know that they are a part of yourselves."

"We understand," said McCabe.

"Come on Dick, I'll go with you," said Uncle George.

"All right."

"We must leave two to guard the horses," said Timberlake. After a little discussion on the subject Tom Goff and Garland Moore were left to guard the horses.

"Now Dick come on."

McCabe was nervous and anxious, yet he was no coward. He was as brave and daring as any one.

"I wish we could find him, Uncle George."

"So do I."

"Which way will we go?"

"West."

"Come on."

They started through the thick woods holding their cocked revolvers in their hands ready for any emergency.

"Hark!" said Dick.

They halted.

"Do you hear that, Uncle George?"

"I hear something like the tramping of feet."

"That's it."

"Where is it?"

"Directly ahead of us."

"You are right."

Of course the tramping of feet could be none other than Jesse James, the escaping outlaw, and Dick McCabe fully impressed with the idea that he it was, already had his pistol raised ready to fire. Uncle George touched his arm, and in a whisper said:

"Don't you do it, Dick."

"Why?"

"Don't, it may be some of our friends."

"But there's only one."

"I don't know—there may be two."

Dick was nervous and anxious as usual, but at Uncle George's earnest request he lowered his arm and allowed his pistol to rest muzzle downward at his side.

"Now, Dick—caution!" whispered Uncle George.

"You bet."

"We've not a moment to spare, Dick, for that fellow if it is only one may be, and doubtless is Jesse. Come quick, but noiselessly."

Like two shadows they stole forward swiftly after the retreating figure or figures.

Old Uncle George was a veteran frontiersman.

He had emigrated to Missouri in an exceedingly early day, while the Indians were still at large in the woods, and had become a great scout and hunter. He was thoroughly versed in woodcraft and knew full well just how to creep through the wood without making any noise. Not even a twig snapped beneath his weight nor was a leaf scarce rustled.

Dick, nervous, anxious and excited as he was, was quite different from the old veteran. He was constantly bumping against trees, stumbling his toes against loose stones and making as much noise as a frightened steer.

"Dick, can't ye keep still?" asked Uncle George.

"Yes."

Dick stopped.

"Why don't ye come on?"

"Thought you wanted me to keep still, Uncle George."

"No."

"Then why did ye ask me if I could?"

"Can't you come on without makin' so much all-fired noise?"

"Well now that seems doubtful. My eyes ain't none the best, ye know, and first thing I know I come plump against a great big tree, stone or something o' the kind."

"Well, miss as few as possible and come on—I don't know whether there are two or one ahead."

They pushed on at a more rapid rate, and parted the bushes with their hands, and pressed on close after the retreating feet.

"Faster!" whispered Uncle George.

"He goes faster."

"I know it."

"Let me shoot."

"Not yet."

The two pursuers were going almost at a run.

Dick McCabe was now all excitement. They were feared by the person or persons in front, of that there could be no question. The scrambling, running, tearing through briars and thorns all indicated that they were overheard. And away they hastened pressing on, pushing forward with all might and main, and hoping to soon overtake the fugitive.

"Can ye see him?" Dick whispered.

"No."

"I believe I do."

"Be certain."

"Better let me shoot."

"No."

"It may bring him to bay."

"Nonsense, Dick. You might hit a friend."

"I don't believe any of our boys got ahead of us. We are in advance of all the others."

There was a short interval of silence, broken only by McCabe's stumbling and blundering along over the stones and bushes, and finally bringing him up square against a tree, with such force as to wring from him a grunt of agony.

"Dick!"

"Oh, what?" growled Dick, in no very good humor.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Collided with a tree, that's all," growled Dick. "Confound it, I have more bad luck than any man in existence."

"Take care, he is just ahead."

"Then let us open up on him."

"Oh, no, wait, and don't think about that until we are sure."

They ran on a little further, and came to a halt at the bottom of a steep hill or bluff. A stone, loosened by some one who was climbing to the top, became loosened and rolled down to the bottom.

"Whist!" cried Uncle George. "He's climbing up the bluff."

"Let me shoot."

"Not yet. When he gets up where the edge of the bluff cuts the sky we can see by the starlight whether there are two or one," Uncle George answered.

"Then at the bottom of the bluff they crouched, waiting for the man or men to come out in the dim relief afforded by the starlight.

"Look—look, I see him!" whispered Dick as a dark form was discovered climbing over the bluff. It's he?"

Dick leveled his revolver at the object, but Uncle George touched his arm and said:

"Wait."

"Why?"

"There are two."

"Two?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I can see—look."

"You are right."



Two forms could now be distinctly seen climbing up over the edge of the bluff, and Dick McCabe felt a bitter disappointment.

"It's not Jesse," whispered Uncle George. "No—but I can't hardly believe it is our boys."

"Why?"  
"We started out first. No one could have gotten around us I don't think."

"Yet they might."  
"That's so."

"You know Timberlake sent us by twos so that we might know each other. If any man is found singly he is to be slain."

"Yes. Well, what are we to do?"  
After a moment's reflection Uncle George said:

"Well, it's no use to go any further in this direction. If he has gone this way the two boys, whoever they be, will overhaul him, I guess."

"Yes."  
"Let's go another direction."

Well it was for Jesse W. James and the old hermit who was so strangely aiding him to escape that Timberlake had issued his order that his men were to go in twos, and to molest none found in twos, but to kill or capture every man found alone.

Jesse and the hermit were near enough to hear the order, and the shrewd old hermit whispered in the outlaw's ear:

"Jesse, that'll save us."  
"How will it?"

"Two together are not be molested."

"So I heard."

"Well, you and I make two."

"Yes."

"And we'll stay close together."

Jesse shrugged his shoulders, and with his soul almost boiling over with hate, said:

"I would rather turn on them and tear them to pieces."

"You would, no doubt."

"Yes, I would."

"But you won't."

"I don't know."

"Come on, Jesse James, you are too sensible for anything of the kind."

Jesse allowed himself to be dragged along through the darkness and trees, muttering as he hurried along.

"Oh, Lightfoot, noble Lightfoot, you shall be avenged."

There was a momentary silence, then the old hermit understanding the nature of the great outlaw, whispered in his ear:

"Lightfoot died for you."

"Yes, he did."

"Do you want him to die in vain?"

"What do you mean?"

"That a gallant horse gave his life to save yours, and now do you want the horse to die in vain. Do you want to throw away the life he saved by giving his own?"

Jesse could hardly comprehend the old man, though he hastened along at his side, and muttered under his breath:

"I'll be revenged yet. Lightfoot shall be avenged; we'll see, we'll see!" and then he gnashed his teeth in silence.

"Then you can be avenged, but not by stopping here to meet certain death," the hermit answered.

"Go on, I'll follow."

They started off westward along a path which the old hermit knew so well that he could travel it by night almost as well as by daylight.

He kept a hand on Jesse's arm, and occasionally whispered some word of comfort or encouragement in the ear of the bandit king.

"Where are the other members of the band, Jesse?" the old man asked.

"Scattered."

"Have you never rallied since the Atterville affair?"

"What do you know of the Atterville affair?" Jesse asked in amazement.

"All."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Who are you, anyway?"

"Your friend. Come on, and ask no more questions."

"You are a mystery."

"Whist! do you hear that?" asked the hermit.

"No, what is it?"

"We are pursued."

"What! Then by all that's—"

"Hold on, Jesse, hold on. Put up that revolver. You don't need it just now."

"What do you mean?"

"Keep your revolver as a last resort. Come on, we can escape them yet."

"I have been run to earth," said Jesse in a voice that was dangerous.

"They have hunted me down like a wild beast, and now they shall pay for it with their lives."

"Be sensible."

"I am."

"Then follow me."

The old hermit, with speed and agility remarkable in one of his age, ran down the path dragging Jesse after him.

"Jesse!"

"What?"

"You were a scout during the war, I believe?"

"Yes, I was."

"Did you ever learn how to run without noise?"

"Yes."

"Please exercise your caution now."

"I will if I can. But it's so dark, and I can't see my way."

"I will lead you."

He took Jesse's hand in his own, and thus they proceeded to the bluff where they came so nearly being overhauled by Uncle George and Dick McCabe.

Jesse suddenly paused as they reached the bluff, and the hermit whispered:

"Come on."

"Whist!"

"What's the matter?"

"We are pursued."

"I know it."

"And as we go up over the bluff we will be fired on."

"Well, come on."

"And get their fire?"

"No—they'll see two together, and believe us a part of their number," whispered the hermit.

Then they began climbing up the steep bluff.

Having got safely over on the other side, the hermit said:

"Now we are safe."

"They may come over on this side," said Jesse.

"If they do they'll not find us."

"Whither go we now?"

"To a hiding-place they can't find."

He took Jesse's hand in his, and led him along a path among some rocks, and through the bushes until they reached what seemed a bluff.

Before them was a great slab of slate stone, which the hermit rolled away, and before them was a deep, dark cavern.

"Walk in," said the hermit.

### CHAPTER III.

#### TIMBERLAKE AND BAND.

ALL night long Timberlake and his resolute determined band of followers searched the forest in vain for the outlaw.

It was in the wee small hours of the night that Uncle George Nelson and his younger companion returned to the spot where their horses had been left, and which was to be a sort of rallying ground for the sheriff's posse. It was but a few moments after their return before Timberlake came in himself.

Everybody but the indomitable sheriff was used up.

As usual, Timberlake was tireless. He was unconquered and unconquerable.

"Well, sheriff," said Uncle George, "it seems like hunting for a needle in a haystack."

"Yes, but I'll find him."

"Not to-night."

"Then I'll be here in the morning."

"Which won't be a great while."

"Well, I suppose not."

Then came a few moments silence. The giant sheriff took a fresh chew of tobacco from his plug, and continued to masticate it with an eagerness which indicated the anxiety of his mind.

He took short strolls from the camp, as we will call the stopping place, and then returned.

"Are the boys all in?" he asked of Uncle George Nelson, who acted as lieutenant.

"No."

"How many out yet?"

"Half."

"So many?"

"Fully."

"Well, all will be in by daylight."

"I suppose so."

"Oh, if I had the villain that rode that horse to death," growled the sheriff, "I would make him rue the day he ever robbed a bank or held up a train!"

"What a pity he killed the horse, Timberlake."

"Yes."

"Lightfoot was a fortune."

"He was."

"Ran down half a score of horses before he died."

"I don't see how Jesse could desert such a horse even after he was dead. He was devotedly attached to Lightfoot."

"Yes, devotedly attached; but Jesse James is a knave. Now I wonder why our boys don't come in—it's growing late."

"It is late."

The morning star had risen, and the eastern sky was growing rosy with light.

Timberlake's men dropped in occasionally and threw their exhausted forms on the ground to fall asleep.

All save two on guard, and the sheriff himself, were buried in sleep.

Timberlake was as sleepless as he was tireless. His active jaws were busily at work on his huge quid of tobacco.

The occasional sigh of tired horses, or snoring of weary riders as they lay upon the grass, alone broke the awful silence which reigned about the place.

The eastern horizon grew brighter and brighter, as if some master painter with brush was giving it invisible sweeps of crimson.

"It'll soon be daylight, and yet the boys haven't all come in yet," said Timberlake.

Day dawned, and he saw two more of his men coming in from the far off hills to the northeast. He went to meet them.

"Hello, Lewis, what news do you bring?" asked the sheriff.

"We've had a night o' it," was the answer.

"In what way?"

"Climbin' hills, rollin' down 'em again, fallin' in ditches and over rocks and logs, and wadin' creeks."

"Did you find him?"

"No."

"No sign?"

"Not o' hide or hair."

"Well that's mysterious."

"I tell ye, Timberlake," Lewis added in a strange, mysterious manner.

"What d'ye mean?"

"I believe Jesse James is in league with old Nick."

"The big sheriff was still very much in doubt as to his meaning. He again asked:

"What do you mean by that, Lewis?"

"He ain't natural, sheriff. I tell you he ain't natural and he's just dodged out o' the way somewhere in the ground, or gone up in the air. Melted, disappeared."

"Oh, nonsense, Lewis. Jesse James is only a man, a natural man, just like any of us."

"Well, where did he go?"

"I don't know. If I did I would be after him."

"I tell ye, Sheriff Timberlake, I am perfectly willing to fight anything that's common and human, but when it comes to fightin' a thing that's not human, I want to be left out."

"Come back to camp."

In a few minutes it was broad daylight.

The sun rose over the eastern hills, and the horses began to nibble the grass about them. The men awake began to stir about, and the warm sun shining on the faces of the sleepers awoke them.

Soon all were on their feet, and Timberlake counted his men.

"Are all here?" asked Uncle George.

"No, Rube Davis and old Sol Kitchen are still absent."

"I'll bet they've been gobbled up," suggested Lewis.

"Gobbled up?"

"Yes."

"Who'd gobble them up?" asked Timberlake.

"Jesse James. I tell you that fellow can just make a mountain shake."

"Hush such abominable nonsense, Lewis," cried Timberlake, who having had neither supper nor sleep, was in no very amiable mood.

At this moment they were all startled at hearing the distant report of a gun. The echoes of the shot went rolling among the crags, peaks and hills of the great old forest.

"What's that?" cried everybody, and in a moment everybody was on their feet, and everybody had a cocked rifle or pistol in his hand.

"Come—mount!" cried Timberlake, and in a moment the horsemen were all in their saddles and had the bridle reins in one hand and a cocked weapon in the other.

"Which direction came that shot?" Timberlake asked.

They were in a bit of lowlands surrounded by hills and rocks, and the report of the pistol was very deceitful.

"It came from the west," cried Uncle George.

The word of a man of such long experience as



Uncle George had had in these woods and other woods was not to be slighted.

"Are you quite sure it was west?" asked Timberlake, his face burning with anxiety and his eyes glistening with eagerness.

"I know it."

"Very well, to the west be it, then. Forward." Bang!

A second report rang out to westward, and the echoes of the shot rolled away along among hills, crags and peaks.

"That was west."

"Yes, it was west."

"Forward."

Like a thunderbolt, as one man and one horse, the trained cavalcade thundered forward over hill and dell, brake and steep.

They had not gone half a mile when Timberlake saw a bare-headed man running toward them.

"Halt!" he cried.

"In a moment every horse was reined in."

"What do you see Sheriff," asked Uncle George.

"Look!"

"Aye, aye."

"Do you see anybody?"

"A bare-headed man."

"Do you make him out, Uncle George?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Old Sol Kitchen, and he is bareheaded and alone, coming directly toward us."

"Where is Rube?"

"I don't see him."

Crack! went a distant shot.

"Gee whiz, see how old Sol jumped!"

A thin, pale-blue cloud of smoke was seen issuing from a clump of bushes and stones two hundred paces to the rear of old Sol Kitchen, and from where Timberlake sat on his horse he saw a little spurt of dust beneath the old fellows' feet as he jumped.

"They are cuttin' purty close to old Sol, boys," said Timberlake.

"You bet they are," put in Uncle George Nelson. "They like to a got him that time, for sure."

"They've got old Sol worked up."

"Great guns, look."

"Where?"

"Up the hill-side; there comes a boulder that'll crush him."

A monster stone was loosened by some invisible power and went thundering down the mountain-side, raising a cloud of dust and dirt as it came.

Old Sol Kitchen heard the wild thundering of the avalanche, heard the earth trembling and looking up saw his danger. His life depended on his legs, and, oh, how he ran.

His bald head, shining like a comet in the early morning sun, flashed through the dust and came out ten paces ahead of the shrub-crushing boulder.

"Who rolled that stone down the hill?" cried the sheriff.

"I guess it was about ready to drop, and the rifle report loosened it."

Old Sol Kitchen now came in sight again.

"Forward!" cried the sheriff, and the posse clapped spurs to their horses and once more galloped forward to meet the perspiring, panting, dust-covered old bald head.

They soon came up to him, and old Sol was blowing like a porpoise.

"Why, yer 'tarnal fools," he panted, between his gasps for breath. "Air yer a-going ter let a feller be cut up inter mince hash, and not open yer heads?"

"We were coming, Sol."

"Coming thunder!" panted old Sol, sitting down on a stone and mopping his bald head with a red bandanna handkerchief. "So was Christmas, but while—" again he panted, "you war a-comin'—them fellers war a-comin' too, like li—lightnin' express."

"Who were they, Sol?"

"James Boys."

"James Boys?"

"Yes."

"But there are none here but Jess."

"Don't yer—fool yerself—" and, after taking a few moments more to pant, he added, "Seems like that Quantrell's hull—army air como ter life agin."

"Well, Sol, where is Rube?"

"Up thar."

"Up the valley?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't he come?"

"Couldn't."

"Why?"

"'Cause he got a forty ton stun down on his

head and six bullets through his body an' it kinder discouraged him like."

"You don't mean he is dead?"

"Well, ef he ain't stuns and bullets won't do it."

"Boys," cried Timberlake, his eyes flashing with eagerness for battle. "We've got some sharp work in hand and we will have to get at it in earnest."

"All right, cap, I'm ready to begin," cried Dick McCabe.

"First to begin, first to quit," whispered Uncle George Nelson.

"Not much. You can just bet I'm there to stay."

"Sol, did you see any of them?" asked Timberlake of the man who was still panting and rubbing his bald head.

"See any of 'em? Thunder!" panted old Sol.

"Yes. Did you see any of them?"

"No."

"Then how do you know there were so many as you state?"

"I heerd 'em. I felt 'em, and I smelt their powder, too."

"Well, can you ride?"

"Yes."

"Get on a horso right quick and let's be going."

"Gosh, I'm about used up. Think of a man nigh on to sixty a-goin' it day an' night."

"We must rid the world of the James Boys," said the sheriff. "It's a duty imposed on us."

"Yes; I wish they'd impose a duty on me to kill all the painters and grizzlies with a pitchfork. It's easier'n monkeyin' with them dratted James Boys!"

But old Sol Kitchen was no coward.

Once more he mopped his bald head, sweeping off the sweat and grease, and climbed somewhat stiffly into the saddle.

The cavalcade again started at a thundering gallop across country toward the pass from which their baldheaded companion had so recently emerged.

They found the narrow valley or canyon filled with rocks and boulders and dead trees and tall grass, and in fact most everything calculated to impede their progress.

"By George, I don't believe we'll ever get through with whole necks," said McCabe as his horse stumbled the fifth or sixth time, and came nearly falling.

"If yer necks are whole, yer skins be holey," put in Old Sol Kitchen.

"Look sharp, we are coming close among them," cried Timberlake.

Crack!

A bullet whistled through the air.

"Let me shoot!" cried McCabe.

"Do you see anything to shoot at?"

"No."

"Then what's the uso to fire?"

"Oh, I want to get some of them. I want to shoot."

"And when you had fired all your bullets in the air you would be at their mercy," said the sheriff. "Reserve your fire."

They rode on into the dangerous pass, each horseman keeping a sharp lookout on every side for the enemy, who were perched up among the rocks and trees of the bluffs on one side or the other, perhaps on both.

They seemed to be riding right into a death pass, from which there was little prospect of escape, but Timberlake, brave as a lion, and daring as any gladiator, rode on heedless of danger.

Though not a man would complain, all became strangely silent. Every face was white with dread, though not a pale blue lip would dare to avow it.

Even the rocks and hills might at any moment tumble down upon them.

"Sol Kitchen!" cried Timberlake.

"Yes."

"Come here."

Old Sol urged his horso up alongside that of the sheriff, and mopping his bald head in a cool, unconcerned manner, asked:

"What yer want, sheriff?"

"Where is your hat?"

"I lost it last night in their brush some'ars."

"Where is the body of Rube?"

"Up ther holler."

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Bullets whizzed like a swarm of bees above their heads, and their horses became frightened, and reared and plunged and refused to go forward.

"Hold on, hold on!" cried Timberlake.

"There's but one man doing all this. Are you

fellows going to let Jesse James run you out of the valley?"

The words of the sheriff had a tendency to prevent a panic. The posse again wheeled their frightened horses about, heads to front, and flourished their revolvers in the air.

From far up the cliff could be seen a small cloud of pale blue smoke, and Dick McCabe was in an ecstasy of delight.

"There—there," he cried, "is something to fire at!"

"Where?" asked Timberlake.

"From behind that bush there is issuing a cloud of smoke. Let us shoot, for he is behind there."

"I doubt it."

"Let me try."

"Try."

Dick galloped a few paces forward and began banging away as he rode at the bushes above. Shot after shot he sent whizzing spitefully into the bush and against the rocks.

No answering shot came, and he drew rein to wait for the others to overtake him.

His horse gave a snort of terror, and, on gazing down upon the ground ahead of him, Dick saw an object that caused him to shudder.

And well it might.

Lying, bleeding and mangled, among some broken rocks beneath the bluff was the body of Sol's companion, who had fallen early in the morning beneath a bowlder and pistol bullets.

"Well, did you hit anybody?" Timberlake asked, on joining him.

"No."

"I thought not."

"Look there."

"Where—what—"

"At that dead body," pointing at the ghastly sight among the grass and rocks.

"Yes, it's Rube, poor fellow. Aye, I knew some one would come to a sad end."

At this moment, a sharp explosion was heard above, the air seemed darkened, and Uncle George Nelson cried:

"Look out, here comes the whole hill tumbling down upon us."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### JESSE AND THE BOYS.

It was a terrible sight, indeed.

A great mass of rock had been loosened by the explosion and was rolling like one tremendous avalanche down upon the valley below.

Timberlake saw all in a moment, and realized that they must act at once or they would be lost.

"To the right and left scatter!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

Then there was wheeling of horses quickly about.

Deep into the quivering flanks sunk the rowels, and with wild shouts of pain and terror the horses leaped wildly to the right and left, clearing a path for the monster stone to roll into. Down it came.

Rolling and thundering until the earth and air trembled, leaving a great train of fire behind it!

At last, with a boom that seemed to make the earth quake, it reached the bottom, tearing up great trees by the roots, and scattering fragments of stone and debris in every direction.

Old Sol Kitchen was out of the reach of the boulder, but it struck a dead tree, and a great slab of wood, which was torn off by the force of it, struck the old bald-headed fellow in the side and almost unseated him.

He presented such a ludicrous spectacle as he clung to the side of his horse and shouted:

"Woa, Blaze, woa!" that nearly everybody began to laugh.

This roused the irritable old fellow, and turning on Dick McCabe he cried:

"You binned fool, I believe ye'd larf ef a feller war bein' ground ter powder beneath them air mill stones."

"Fall back a little!" commanded Timberlake.

"We'll get out of reach of the bowlders."

They fell back two hundred feet, and then every eye began scanning the bluff above. Not a sign of a human being was to be seen.

A chipmunk was seen skipping away to its hole in the rocks.

A bird which had been frightened temporarily from its accustomed haunts by the tumult now returned and hopped nimbly about among the rocks, apparently careless of all danger.

"Look sharp!" cried Timberlake.

"Do you see any sign of them?" asked Uncle George.

"No. But I want all to look sharp until we do."

A few minutes passed in utter silence. Not a



sound was heard, nor a sign of any one was to be seen.

"Timberlake!" cried McCabe, who was all impatience.

"What?"

"Let me go up the hill-side. I want to get him."

"Be keeful or he'll git you."

"No, he won't. I want to run the muzzle of my revolver right down his throat."

"All right."

"Do you say go?"

"Yes."

"Here goes then."

He sprang from his horse and began to prepare for the ascent up the bluff.

"That's one man gone," growled Tom Goff.

If Dick heard him he made no answer.

nothing save the birds in the air about him, and his companions below.

"What do you see?" called Timberlake from below.

"Nothing but the stones and forests."

"Look well now that you are there."

He did so.

He searched every bush and tree, every mound and stone, but in vain.

There was no sign of any one, or that any one had ever been there.

Had he not heard the shots and the explosion, he would have been persuaded that the great mass of rock which had rolled down the inclined plane was loosened other than by human aid.

But now that he turns his eyes down upon the shelf from where the shots had been fired, he sees something bright and glittering.

"So I can't be seen."

"I think so."

Then he conducted Jesse to what was an upper entrance of the grotto, a hole forty feet above the lower entrance.

It was just large enough for him to squeeze through, and came out upon a narrow ledge concealed by bushes.

Jesse crawled along this to the broader shelf where he shot Rube Davidson and fired the other shots, planted powder under a leaning boulder and blew it down the hill as we have narrated, and returned to the cavern unseen.

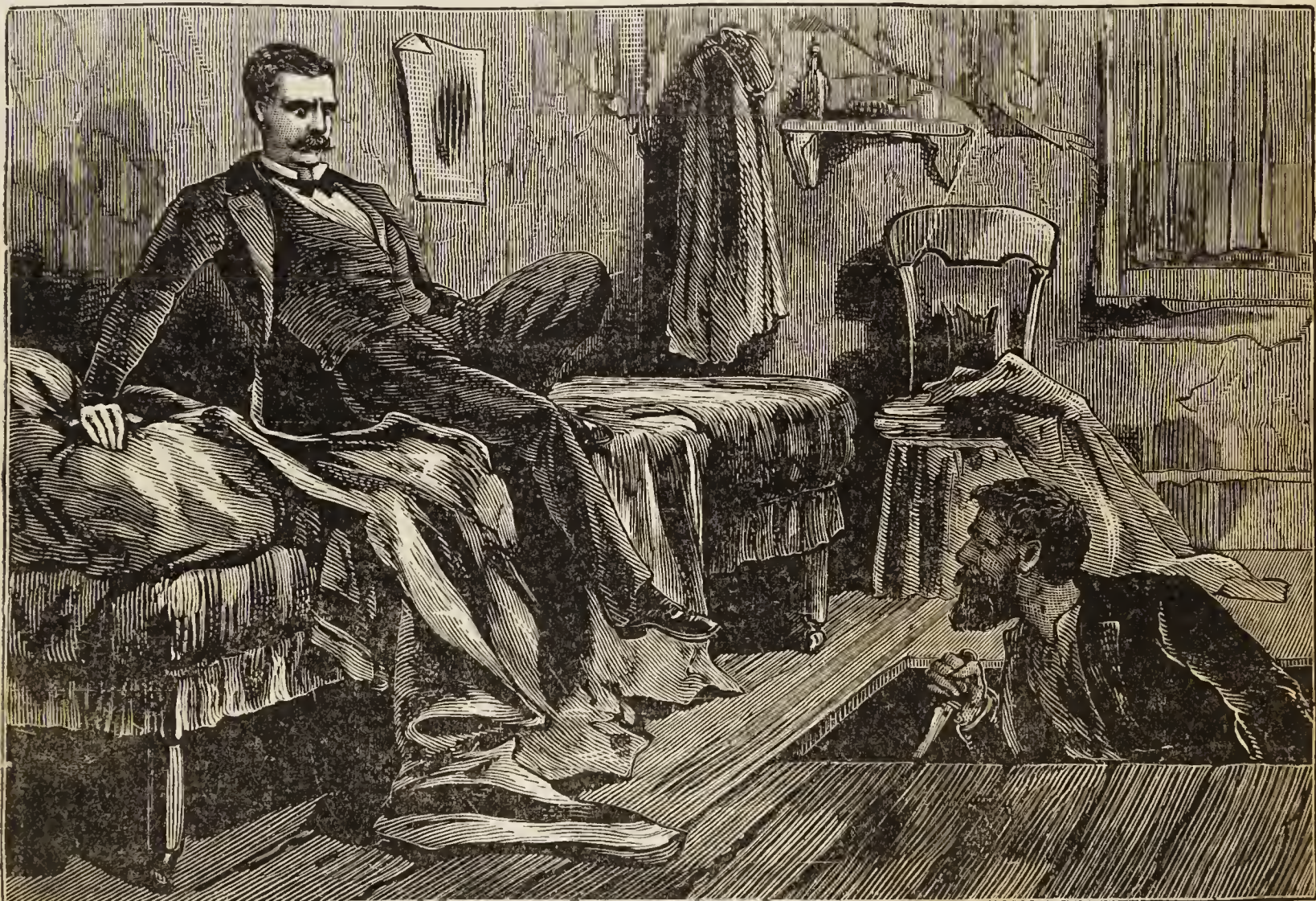
"Well," said the Hermit on his return.

"I've done 'em up."

"What have you done?"

"Given them something to reflect on."

"How many are in the valley?"



"Who are you?" cried the young man leaping from the bed. "Old Satan," answered Jesse James, displaying his long, sharp-bladed dagger.

Turning to Timberlake, he said:

"You'd better keep the whole hill side covered with your pistols and be ready to shoot at the first sign of any one."

"We will."

"Good bye, boys, if we never see each other again."

He was evidently aware of the dangerous enterprise in which he had embarked, and realized that the chances of his getting back alive were small.

But Dick had a brave, determined heart.

Nimble as a squirrel he ascended the steep and stony hill side.

From crag to crag and cliff to cliff he climbed, and went on and on, higher and higher, until the shelving rock on which grew the bunch of bushes from behind which the shots had been fired, was reached.

Dick clutched the stone shelf with his left hand, and drawing a pistol with his right, raised himself by his strong left arm until his head was almost on a level with the bluff, and then thrusting the muzzle of his pistol in among the bushes he fired.

The rattling crash of shot after shot rang out like a continuous volley from his self-cocking revolver, until every chamber had been emptied.

But not one answering shot came back.

He was a little surprised at this, and drawing himself up over the face of the rock he leaped on the shelf.

No one was there.

"He is gone!" cried Dick.

Gone; but gone where?

He went up the bluff to the top, but could see

"Ay—there's a clew."

In a moment he was down on the stone shelf and had the bright object in his hand.

It was the empty shell of a pistol cartridge.

Five others lay on the stone shelf, and four of them were still warm, as if but recently fired.

"There is no mistake about it now—Jesse James was here—and from this spot fired at us, but where is he now?"

That was a great question which the daring McCabe was not then and there to answer.

He searched until he grew weary, and the patience of his friends below was almost worn threadbare.

Then, much as he disliked to do so, he had to give up the thought of finding the James Boys, and went away down the bluff to join his companions.

Where was Jesse James?

No doubt the reader is getting anxious about him, as well as Timberlake and McCabe and others.

We left him entering the cavern with the hermit.

Jesse was shown to a place where there were some soft skins on which he laid down and had a comfortable nap.

The grotto in which he was hiding, and which was the home of the hermit, was at the head of the ravine or valley.

Next morning, at dawn, the hermit discovered that two of their pursuers were dangerously near. He awoke Jesse and told him.

"Now what shall we do?" asked the hermit.

"Leave that to me," said Jesse. "Is there a way out of here?"

"Yes."

"All were there."

"Are they there now?"

"No."

"Gone?"

"Not yet. One's dead and the others are going."

"You had to kill one?" asked the old hermit, clutching Jesse's arm.

"Yes—there was no help for it, I had to do it," Jesse answered.

The old hermit seemed uneasy over the announcement. Rubbing his bearded cheek he said:

"It would have been better—much better, had no blood been shed in the valley. There once was a time when I gloried in deeds of violence, but not now, no not now."

Jesse was too much interested in present matters to pay any heed to the strange mutterings of the old hermit. After a few moments in the cavern he crept forth again to see what new discoveries could be made.

The posse headed by Timberlake was slowly retreating down the valley.

"There they go?" he said to himself, "and a good riddance indeed. Oh, how I wish that I was rid forever of Timberlake. He is my bane, my evil genius."

A slight noise at his side caused him to look around and he saw standing on the same shelving rock with himself a no less personage than the mysterious hermit who had so strangely befriended him.

"Well, young man, you feel at liberty now, don't you?"

"No, I will never know what freedom is while I live," said Jesse.



"Why!"

"Those human blood hounds are not gone for good. Somewhere in the winding paths of life we will meet again and when we do then there will be more blood shed."

"Pray heaven it be not in my valley, Jesse James for I don't want the white stones and green shrubs which I have, stained."

Jesse gazed at the strange old man for a few moments and asked:

"How long have you lived here?"

"How long!" and the white bald head was bowed for a few moments in reflection, and then he said: "It has been a great many years since I came here, Jesse James, I can't tell you how many, but it has been a long while."

"Have you lived all the time in that cave?"

"Yes—most of the time."

"Alone?"

"I sometimes have a visitor, but not many. I don't care much to see people."

"Jesse's interest in the strange, weird being now became greater than his interest in that retreating caravan, which had grown so small it was but a speck in the distant horizon."

"Why do you prefer such a life?" he asked.

The old face was bowed, and a troubled look came over it. For a moment he was silent, then pointing at his breast, he sighed:

"Conscience, conscience, conscience!"

He spoke slowly, and in tones that were sadness in themselves. Jesse James, who had felt but little the remorse of conscience, could not but wonder what crime the old man had committed which should drive him to the cliffs and caves to live a life of seclusion.

"Do you mean your conscience hurts you?" Jesse asked.

He nodded.

"What have you done?"

The old man spread out his hands before Jesse James and fixing his dark-brown eyes on the face of the outlaw, asked:

"Do you see these?"

"Yes."

"There's blood on them."

Jesse laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"That's but a trifle," the bandit answered.

"I have killed over a hundred men. I have shot so many that I have lost count."

The old man's eyes were on the ground and he was lost in painful thought for a moment, then he said:

"But you never killed one you loved?"

"No."

"Then you don't know what remorse is."

There was a deep, solemn silence, and Jesse said:

"Let's go in the cave."

"All right."

When the cavern was reached Jesse James sunk down on a pile of skins and said:

"Now tell me your story. It must be a sad and interesting one."

"Tell my story?"

"Yes."

"Why, sir, I have never told my story to a living mortal. It has been now these fifteen years since it happened, and I never yet told it to any one."

"Then it was high time you were confiding that sad story, whatever it may be, to some one, and who is more worthy to hear it than he whose life you have saved?"

"Well, perhaps I might feel better if I should tell it."

"Tell it."

"When the great War of the Rebellion broke out I was living in Missouri near the Kansas line. I never lived beyond the borders of this State, and never crossed the line into another but once. I was a Confederate, Jesse James, the same as you, and I hated everybody who was not a Confederate. I was a young man working as a farm hand on the farm of Ogden Bryce in Jackson county, and was one of the first to enlist. My parents were dead, but I had a sister, younger than I by four years, who I thought lived in Missouri, but she really lived in Kansas. We were all that was left of our family, and Mr. Mantel, a kind gentleman, had taken my orphan sister to raise."

"Well, as I said, I went with the first secessionists. I was a secessionist because Bryce was, and he was my employer. I look to be eighty now, don't I?"

"Yes."

"I am but forty-two. That shows what grief will do with a man."

"Go on," said Jesse.

The old man passed his hand over his face, and for a moment seemed to be struggling with some inward pain.

At last he went on:

"I joined Quantrell's band. There I first met you. You knew me then as one of the most daring of all the band."

Jesse looked at him in amazement. There was not a single feature of this old man that was familiar to him, and he was almost persuaded that he was mistaken.

"What was your name?" he asked.

"No, no. Don't ask me that. I can tell my story, but my name I have sworn never to utter since that fatal day. I have never heard it breathed by mortal lips, and trust I never may. If you will let me go on I will finish, but my name I never will reveal. I am dead to all the world. It was supposed that I died in battle but I live, and I—I—can't die."

"Go on."

"Well, you know how Quantrell's band all mustered under his black flag, and how we marched from Missouri over into Kansas and on to Lawrence. How we struck the town at early morn, and how the wild fight, nay, massacre raged, for we could not call it a fight."

"I know all about it," answered Jesse, as though he would rather not have the subject mentioned.

"Well, I was in that fight. I went first in the wild charge of slaughter, and it was amid the sulphurous smoke, and burning houses, ring of fire-arms, and cries of wounded and dying that I saw a little group trying to escape. There was one man about middle age, with a benevolent face, his wife, a young girl with golden hair and blue eyes and two young children."

"Oh, what a sweet morsel for one of Quantrell's men, I thought. You know, Jesse, that we slew the innocent in those days as well as the middle aged. Nothing in Lawrence was to live."

"I reloaded a pair of deadly revolvers and took the rein in my teeth. I clapped spurs and down on the group I rode, sending a rattling hail of death into the group. Father and mother went down first, then their babes at their side. Alone stood the young lady, fair as the morning, her sweet, innocent face turned toward me, smiling through her tears. I was almost on her before I fired, and just as the report cut the air that sent the bullet to her heart she cried:

"Brother, brother, spare me!"

"In a moment I was off my horse and had the sinking girl in my arms. I called her by name, but she was already speechless. The blood oozed from her mouth, and she died in my arms."

"I had killed my own sister. Then I swore to live the life of a hermit. I clipped a lock of her golden hair from her head and have ever since worn it next my heart. I did not go back with Quantrell, but for days roamed over Kansas, almost insane, and running many risks of being slain, but at last, after innumerable adventures, I came here, and in this cavern have lived ever since, subsisting like a wild animal on what game I could catch and what I could beg and steal from the settlement. But now things have picked up some, and I am a little better, you see. I have a small field of corn near by, and I have tilled it until it yields me my bread. My clothing, my meat and vegetables I manage to get very easily."

"Then you need no money?"

"No."

Jesse was very strangely impressed by the old hermit's story. He rose and went out on the shelving rock.

Timberlake and posse had disappeared in the east, but what means that group to westward. He saw a half a dozen horsemen coming down the valley from the direction opposite which the sheriff and posse had gone.

A glance and Jesse recognized them.

"It's Frank—Frank James, Cole Younger, and the boys," he cried exultingly. And then unable to wait for them to come nearer he rushed back to the cavern, plunged into the hole, and descended to the entrance at the bottom of the hill.

"Where are you goin'?" cried the hermit, seizing Jesse's arm.

"They are coming—they are coming," cried Jesse.

"Who?"

"The boys."

"Where are you going?"

"To meet them."

"Wait a moment, you must not, you shall not go until I have exacted a promise from you."

"A promise?"

"Yes."

"What promise?"

"Swear that you will tell no one of my presence here."

Jesse was amazed at the man who glared at him with a maniacal stare.

"Why those are only comrades. Only my boys."

"But they must not know I am here. Promise me, swear to me."

"I will."

"Do you swear?"

"I do."

"They say Jesse James keeps his word. Now you may go."

Jesse went.

He ran out into the valley just as the cascade of outlaws came up, and cried:

"Hold, boys—here I am."

## CHAPTER V.

### QUITTING THE FOREST.

THE James Boys' band drew rein and looked at their chief in amazement.

"Hello, Jesse," cried Frank, "is it you?"

"Yes."

"Where have you been?"

"Running from the enemy and hiding in the woods," he answered.

"Where have you been hiding?"

"Anywhere and everywhere," Jesse answered.

There was hesitation on his part to reveal the old hermit's secret. Jesse had used the old hermit's retreat to good advantage, and he might be able to do so again. He therefore determined, more from selfish motives than from any desire to keep faith with the old hermit, to keep his secret.

"Where is your horse?" Frank asked.

Jesse was delighted that he asked the question, as it gave him a chance to change the subject.

"Poor Lightfoot has run his last race," he answered, sadly.

"What, is he dead?"

"Yes."

"Killed?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"I."

"You?"

Amazement for a moment held all the banditti dumb. As soon as they could gain their breath they broke forth into such remarks as follows:

"Oh, how could you?"

"And Lightfoot such a noble horse."

"I can't believe it."

"I had to," Jesse answered.

"How? Tell us all about it?"

"Lightfoot ran until he fell dead. He saved me, but it killed him."

Then again a dead silence fell on the group. Jesse's simple story, told in two short sentences, had a wonderful effect on the outlaws. It spoke volumes to them.

They all knew full well what it was to lose a good horse in such a way.

Frank was the first to speak.

"And you were run to death?"

"Lightfoot was, and but for the hope of being able to avenge him, I would have stayed there and died with him," said Jesse.

"Timberlake did it?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"He and his posse, or rather pack of blood-hounds, are now leaving the woods."

"How many are they in number?"

"Nineteen now."

The banditti looked about over their own band, and Cole Younger, interpreting the general question each one would ask, said:

"Well, we are strong enough to do it. Let us do it?"

"Agreed," cried Frank James. "Can we overhaul them, Jesse?"

"We may—but hold on."

"Well?"

"Are you going to leave me here in the wilderness afoot and alone?"

"No."

"That's so," put in Cole Younger. "We have got to look out for Jess some way."

"We have no spare horses."

"Won't some of your horses carry Double?"

"Mine will!" answered Dick Little.

"Well, give me a lift for awhile. It won't be long until we overhaul them, and then I will have a horse of my own to ride."

"That you will," answered all in one breath, and then Jesse, mounted behind Dick Little, started with the others down the narrow valley.

The band was excellently mounted and rode hard. At the end of two hours, however, Dick's



horse, under his double load, began to show strong symptoms of fatigue.

"I will have to change off with some one else," said Jesse. "Dick's horse can't carry both much farther."

"We ought to be right onto them now," said Cole Younger.

"Well they can't be far," Jesse thought.

"Timberlake must travel hard."

Their own horses were always the best, and they had done some good traveling that morning, and thought they ought to have overhauled Timberlake long before this hour.

A meeting with Timberlake in that dark forest could have but one result.

It would be a death struggle. Like tigers grappling each other by the throats and never letting go until one side had been exterminated.

A fight in that wood meant death, for no quarter would be asked or given.

Jesse James suddenly sprang to the ground, and holding up his hand to his companions to halt, placed his finger on his lips to enjoin silence.

He had seen or heard something in that wood to convince him that the enemy were near, and he made a few gestures to indicate silence on the part of all and disappeared in the wood.

Jesse drew his revolver, and holding it in his hand ran down a narrow path in the wood.

The trees and bushes on either side were so low and close together that they sometimes brushed his face. But he put them out of the way with his left hand, holding his cocked pistol in his right.

Forward as stealthy as a fox he crept. Before him was a ravine across which a tree had fallen. The top of the tree was toward him, and its thick branches afforded ample means for crossing.

There was a narrow, swift stream of water flowing through the ravine, and Jesse began crossing over on the tree-top. Slowly making his way through the thick branches, he was about half way over, when he became entangled in the limbs and looked about for the best way to extricate himself. He was not a little puzzled, for the branches were very thick.

Suddenly a sound fell on his ears like falling clouds.

"There," said a voice, "that's the best we can do, Uncle George. Now let's be goin'."

"Don't be in such a hurry, Sol Kitchen," said another voice.

"Well, I don't feel comfortable till I git out o' these woods. That's poor Rube laid away ter rest, and I can't forgit how Jesse's bullets came er-whizzin' past me ez I was runnin' like all possessed."

"And you a-jumpin'."

"Wall, I reckon 'twar erbout time fur a feller ter jump, warn't it."

"Yes."

"The blasted bullet cut a hole clean through my boot leg, an' ef a feller wouldn't jump for that what would he?"

"You made the jump of your life, Sol."

"You bet I did—an' I made the run o' my life."

Leaning over the log, Jesse peered through the thick branches of the dead tree and saw two men standing by a little heap of earth. One of them was stout, thick set, with gray beard and hair on the sides of his head, while the top of his pate was perfectly bald. The other was old and gray, but tall and slender. Both were veterans.

Near them were three horses tied.

"Now is the time to get a horse," Jesse thought. "Bracing himself with his knee upon one of the branches of the tree, he stooped over and swinging himself over to one side so as to get a better view under some overhanging branches and leveled his pistol at the old bald head of Sol Kitchen.

That old bald head was a good mark for such a splendid shot as Jesse James, and as he was less than two hundred paces away, there was no doubt in the bandit's mind of his hitting it.

He got a good aim upon it, but the moment his finger pressed the trigger, the small branch on which his knee rested cracked and bent.

The sharp report cut the air, and Sol Kitchen felt a pain like a red hot iron suddenly touch his bald pate, and leaping three feet in the air, he gave utterance to a yell of rage and fear and took to his heels.

"Stop!" roared Uncle George. "Get your horse."

"Horse—thunder!" and the old fellow, evidently frightened almost out of his wits, flew on at the speed of the wind.

Uncle George was cooler than his companion and more slow to act. His coolness and slowness to act would have been fatal but for the fact

that Jesse James was dangling at the underside of the log, trying to regain his balance so as to get another shot.

Uncle George heard the crashing of dry branches, and fired two or three shots.

Jesse partially regained his position on the log, and let fly a couple of shots at random, one of which pierced the rim and the other the crown of the old man's hat.

"Gosh, it's about time for me to be getting away!" he cried.

He ran to his horse, cut it loose, and cut loose another for old Sol Kitchen. He would have cut loose a third, had he not heard a crashing roar, as if a regiment of cavalry was coming thundering down among the woods upon him, and consequently he put his foot in his stirrup, mounted, and got away as swift as his fleet horse could carry him.

Had not Jesse possessed all the remarkable agility of an athlete he would have fallen into the raging torrent below. But with a skill that was wonderful he climbed upon the log.

"Jess, Jess, where are you?" called a voice which he recognized as belonging to his brother Frank.

"Here on a log."

"Who were you shooting at?"

"Two of Timberlake's veterans. Go down a little lower and you'll find a pond, cross over, because I've a horse on the other side."

The banditti awaited no second bidding, but wheeling their horses about went flying down the stream and crossed over.

Jesse was on the other side coolly untying the horse which had belonged to Rube Davidson, who was in the grove near by.

"Did you get any of them, Jess?" Frank asked.

"I got the horse," he answered.

"But any of the posse?"

"None but the horse."

"Who were you shooting at?"

"I told you I shot at two of old Timberlake's vets."

"And didn't hit?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Well there were several reasons, the main reason is that the main branch on which I was resting my weight while aiming at them, broke and let me down. I fired and came so near falling, I missed the old bald head and he ran away."

"But we heard five or six other shots."

"All at random."

Then ensued a moment's silence during which Cole Younger, who had been lingering behind, came slowly up to the spot, and asked:

"Jesse, were there but two?"

"Two are all, unless you count the fellow under the sod there."

"Where are the others?"

"Well, I'll warrant they're not five miles ahead. Those two only lingered behind to bury the man."

"Boys, let's overhaul 'em. What say you, Jesse? You are captain now."

"Just what I want."

"Can we do it?" asked Ed McMillan.

"Of course."

"Why not?"

"Our horses are pretty badly blown."

"So are theirs," Jesse answered.

"And we'll blow them before we get through with them," said Jim Cummins, who was a sort of a humorist and punster.

"That will do for a hot ride," said Jesse, with a laugh.

"And a hot fight at the end of it," put in Cole Younger.

Jesse was in the saddle now.

Being with the band, he of course was captain, and his will was law. He rode at the head of the band on the horse of the man he had slain, and his fingers seemed to tingle with a peculiar itching to come on the sheriff's posse and take revenge for the loss of his horse.

"We've got to ride to overtake 'em," said Cole Younger.

"I don't know; they won't go fast," answered Wood Hite.

"Won't; why won't they?"

"Because they are in no hurry."

"Now when those two old yelping curs come upon their retreating brothers they'll just get up and climb, unless I am very much mistaken in my guess," said Jim Cummins.

"More likely wheel about and flight."

"Not much flight."

"You'll see."

"Well, we'll know pretty soon," Jesse put in at this moment.

There was something in the manner of the

chief as much as his words which caused everybody to turn their eyes forward and ask:

"What, Jess, do you see 'em?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Bow your heads and look under the branches of those trees, look across the ridge."

"Yes."

"Yes, I do."

"See them just going over the ridge."

Several men could be seen riding across the ridge, and the bandit cried:

"There they go."

"Come on!" cried the excitable Wood Hite. "Let's after 'em and sweep 'em out o' existence."

"All right."

"Hold on!" commanded Jesse.

"Why hold?"

"Don't be in too big a hurry. They are more than two to one, and if you think Timberlake won't fight, you have miscalculated some as to the man you have to deal with."

"Well, I guess he will fight," put in Jim Cummins, "but I guessed that we wouldn't be playing."

"No, yet we'll not be acting the part of fools. We've got to do some shrewd work."

"What do you mean, Jess?"

"Well we— Come on and I will show you."

Jesse James knew that several of Timberlake's men were armed with rifles, and guns in the hands of such experienced marksmen would be dangerous. As they rode forward at a gallop, Jesse said:

"Boys, they've got guns, and I can assure you they will pick us off at long range if we don't look sharp now. Now I tell you, look sharp."

"Yes, we'll look sharp."

They galloped up to the top of the ridge, and Jesse again cautioned them to look sharp.

Old Sol Kitchen could be seen riding along in the rear. He was in his shirt sleeves, had but one suspender to support his trousers, and his bald head glistened like a billiard ball in the sun. He was kicking his spurless heels into the sides of his horse as the animal jogged slowly along the road.

A loud shout announced that the pursuers were discovered.

"Here they are!" roared Timberlake.

"Fours, right about!"

The sheriff and posse wheeled about to face the new comers.

"Scatter," cried Jesse, and look out for their guns.

The most excited man on either side was Old Sol Kitchen. He kicked his horse and urged him to a gallop up and down among the men crying:

"Gim me a gun, somebody, gim me a gun, quick, won't you, I want ter lay him out."

"Who, Sol? Who do ye want to lay out?" asked Dick McCabe.

"That ar' infernal scoundrel what gin me this ere rake across the top o' my head. I jist want to lay him out."

"Be careful, Sol, he don't lay you out."

"Lay me out. He, he, lay me out. Oh, wouldn't I like to get my clutches on him, I'd make him jump higher than he ever made me."

Jesse James could hear the windy old fellow quite distinctly, for the wind was blowing directly from them to him, but he paid no heed to him whatever.

"Boys, watch for the men with guns," he said. "Keep close behind trees, and use only your long range pistols."

"When they empty their gans can't we charge them?" asked Cole Younger.

"Yes, if they shoud ever empty them, but their infernal guns are nearly all Winchester repeating rifles," said Jesse, "and they'll never empty them."

At this moment a sharp report rang out from the bushes beyond, and a ball came whizzing through the air. Long experience in this mode of warfare made the James Boys wary, and they kept close to the trees. Some dismounted, and crouching close to the roots of the trees, opened fire with their longest range pistols.

But they were at a disadvantage.

"Jesse!" Cole called from behind a log.

"What?" asked Jesse.

Jesse had his horse close up behind a big tree, and was firing through the forks.

"Have you hit anybody?"

"No."

"And we won't."

"They won't come near enough."

"They are flankin' us, Jess."

"Where?"



"On the left."

A flank movement was just what Jesse most feared, and he called to two of his men to come with him, and they started to meet the oncoming move.

They met them amid a hail storm of whistling balls, and after an almost superhuman effort drove them back without the loss of a man.

"Jess, it's no use," said Cole. "We're going to be taken in, or we'll have to run for it."

"Confound them, they have been reinforced," said Jesse.

"Yes."

"Do you know how many they are now?"

"No, but I'd guess forty."

"There are fifty if a man."

"I believe you are right."

"And they still increase."

"Let's quit."

"All right."

Jesse gave utterance to a keen whistle which answered for the bugle call to boots and saddles.

In a moment every man was in the saddle and away they went.

"Where now, Jesse?"

"Out of the woods."

"Our horses are not fresh."

"Neither are theirs."

"Do you think they will follow us?"

"I doubt it. They have got such a taste of us in this fight that I think they'll pause a moment to consider the matter before pressing on after us."

They rode until night overtook them, then made a short halt for their horses to graze and to partake of some cold provisions from their saddle-pockets, and again mounted and pressed on.

It was nearly midnight when they came to the outskirts of the forest.

Here they halted for consultation, and decided to separate and scatter over the country to rally at the call of their chief.

## CHAPTER VI.

### JESSE AND FRANK ON THE HIGHWAY.

As was usually the custom when the James Boys scattered, Frank and Jesse James went together.

It was three days after the events narrated in our last chapter that we find two well-dressed young men riding somewhat jaded steeds along a broad turnpike. They were both strangers in this part of the country, and might be cattle buyers, or land traders, travelling preachers, or almost anything.

One thing was evident, and that was they were strangers, for among the many people whom they met there was not a single acquaintance.

They were half way between the Big Blue and the Kansas line in a large scope of country very fertile and thickly populated.

These two individuals were Frank and Jesse James. They showed no sign of the recent trying ordeal through which they had passed, and looked fresh and jubilant.

"Well, Frank, the day has passed without a single adventure," Jesse remarked, gazing at the sun, which was getting lower in the heavens.

"Yes, it will soon be night."

"Well, what shall we do to night?"

"I don't know."

"We haven't had an adventure since we left the woods."

"No."

"And that's three days ago?"

"Yes."

"Well, how is your purse?"

"Slender."

"Mine is empty."

"Have you no money, Jess?"

"Only some small silver. Less than a dollar in all."

"Well—"

"Well?" repeated Jesse, with a laugh.

Frank laughed, and took another squint at the setting sun.

"Jess."

"Well, speak. What is it, Frank, for unless I am very much deceived in you, you have something on your mind."

"I was thinking."

"It's coming. I knew he was thinking, and when Frank begins to think it means something. Now, Frank, my honest brother, just tell me what you were thinking about?"

"I was thinking it would soon be night."

"Oh, the thunder you were."

"Yes, don't you?"

"Yes, but there's something back of it soon being night."

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Frank James rose in his stirrups and looked all about him, apparently as if to see that no one was in ear-shot, and answered:

"This is a pretty good country."

"So it seems."

"Rich people must live hereabout."

"No doubt."

"Rich people travel these roads."

"There, he is getting at it at last," Jesse thought. "Frank is slow sometimes, but he is sure to get there. Go ahead, Frank."

"Well, we might do a little professional work you know, as soon as the sun goes down."

"Yes."

"Suppose we do?"

"I am willing."

"Consider it settled then."

Their horses jogged leisurely along the road, and little clouds and spurts of dust were knocked up from the road by their hoofs.

Jesse gave the departing sun one more glance, and then to his brother said:

"Frank, let us go no further in this direction. We are not far from Nevada, and if we keep on we'll be in the town before we know it. Let us turn out."

"Where?"

"Here's a wood on our left. Let's go out by it."

They wheeled their horses out to one side and rode to the wood. It was a dense wood, and screened them from the many passers by.

"Jesse?"

"Well, Frank."

"I'm hungry."

"Haven't you got a bit of cold bread in your saddle pockets?"

"Yes, but I want a warm supper."

"You do?"

"Yes—let's go to some farm-house and get it, Jesse?"

"Not to-night."

"Why?"

"We want to do some business."

"Yes, but a good supper would not injure me from doing some business."

"But, Frank, it's not policy. Two highway-men on the road, don't you see. Rob a rich old fellow on stage coach, all the papers are full of it, and everybody is inquiring about them. No one can find any description. Has nobody seen them?"

"Yes, old Mrs. So and So swears that two strange men took supper at her house, and she can describe them so plainly to the constables and sheriffs, that Timberlake and his posse are right on our heels, do you see?"

"Yes."

"Now, my dear boy, don't you observe that it's much preferable that you go hungry and eat stale bread to making a mess of it?"

"Oh, yes, I understand all that."

"Then, don't grumble."

"I won't."

Frank took from his saddle pockets some cold provisions, which he proceeded to munch in silence, and when he had satisfied his appetite partially, he sat down at the root of a tree to wait.

Jesse, keen as a hawk, was on the watch.

Now, like a fox hound he starts up, for he hears sounds of horses' hoofs coming down the road.

"Frank!"

"Yes."

"Mount!"

Frank rose gracefully and as lightly as a feather, flung himself in the saddle.

"I am ready."

"Do you hear it?" asked Jesse, as he sprang in the saddle.

"Do you mean a horseman on the road?"

"Yes."

"I hear him."

"There's money there."

"How do you know?"

"Why, I can instinctively tell when a man who carries gold by the way he rides."

"Nonsense," laughed Frank.

"We'll see."

"Oh, he may be rich."

"He is."

"And he may be a pauper."

"He is not."

"Haden't you better wait for a carriage or the stage?"

"No; something seems to tell me that here is money, and now is the time to strike."

"All right," said Frank; "I'm with you all ways."

Those bandit brothers had great confidence in each other. Frank James knew that his brother Jesse was one of the most remarkable men he

had ever met, and that his wonderful powers of reasoning seemed almost supernatural.

There was but one man on the road, and Frank and Jesse never had any fears of one man.

Their horses were thoroughly rested, and they wheeled them about and galloped into the road.

"It wouldn't be very nice if that solitary horseman should turn out to be Timberlake," said Frank.

"No—it wouldn't be nice for Timberlake, I assure you."

"I don't want any trouble to-night, and I hope it isn't Timberlake."

"Well, I am certain I don't want any trouble, either. It's money and not trouble we are both after, but if that fellow Timberlake is here ready for a muss he can have it on short order."

They were now down on the road and by the aid of the pale lambent glow of the far off stars saw a horseman coming towards them.

He was a fat old fellow, dressed in broadcloth and wore an old-fashioned silk cravat, just such as only wealthy old country gentlemen wear.

Jesse James whispered to his brother:

"This is a fat duck for picking, Frank, and there is an abundance of fun in it. Leave the case to me entirely."

"No, no, there's fun in it."

"I know it."

"Well, let me have it."

Jesse reflected a moment and said:

"Well let's both do it then. We can have all the more fun by frightening him more."

"Yes, and two will frighten him more than one."

"You are right. Oh, it will be rich."

They rode down toward the stout old gentleman, who was urging his lazy fat old horse to a slow canter. They came boldly to him, and when he made an effort to ride around them they pulled out on this side and on that, so that he had no way to pass.

"Get cut o' my way you young rascals," he cried at last driven to desperation. "What do you mean?"

"Don't be in a hurry, uncle," said Jesse.

"Uncle, call me uncle, you young knave. Call me uncle and you got no more manners than this."

"Well, well, don't be in a fret now."

"If I could get near enough to you I'd whack you with my whip."

"I have no doubt; but stop."

"Stop."

"Yes."

"What for?"

"We want to talk with you."

"I don't want any truck with you."

"Yes, you do."

"You lie, rowdy—do you hear that. You lie."

"Hush, hush, uncle, you might injure your throat by talking so loud."

"Well, it's nothing to you if I do. Now, look you here, we've had enough of your nonsense. Get out of my road and let me go on, or I'll make it hot for you."

"Well, we like it hot."

"Get out, I say."

"Not yet awhile. What time is it?"

"None o' your business."

"Say, uncle, have you any loose change about you? We have been on a little spree, and we'd like to have enough, you see, to kind o' ride over."

"I wouldn't let you beggars have a cent to save your lives," he cried, his face livid with rage and his whole frame trembling.

"Oh, yes, you would."

"Would I?"

"Yes."

"Humph! Would I?"

"I think so."

"Fool, get out of my way."

He struck his horse a keen cut with his riding-whip, and the animal made a leap as if to go by them, but Jesse seized him by the bit.

"Stop a moment."

"Let go my horse."

"Not so fast."

"I'll cow-hide you."

"You'll be sorry for it."

The old man was furious with rage, and he struck a blow at Jesse, but Frank James caught his hand and held him.

"No you don't," said Frank, and wrung the whip from his hand.

"Maybe you don't know who we are?" said Jesse.

"You are no gentlemen."

"Perhaps not."

"You are not."



"We want your money, that diamond pin, big gold ring, and your elegant watch."

"What?" roared the old man.

"Hand them over."

"Who are you?"

"The James Boys?"

And the dark muzzle of a cocked revolver was thrust into the old man's face.

"Oh, I am done for," he groaned.

"Unless you fork over, you are."

"Oh, dear, spare me."

"Give us your money."

"I haven't any—I am a pauper."

"There you lie," cried the bandit king.

"You have an abundance of money, now fork it over and be in a hurry about it for we have an engagement."

"Are you really the James Boys?"

"Yes."

"Then I must."

"Of course you must."

Jesse touched his horse's flank, came alongside the old man, and thrusting his hand in his inside pocket drew out a fat wallet.

"Oh, don't, don't, don't."

"I know it goes hard with you, uncle. I appreciate how you feel," said Jesse.

"It's like tearing out his heart strings," laughed Frank.

"Yes—but we must tear 'em out."

"Now your watch."

He gave up everything reluctantly and was allowed to go. Grumbling and vowing vengeance he rode on, leaving Frank and Jesse masters of the highway.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ROBBING A HOUSE.

"Oh, did you ever hear of so much fun in your life?" cried Frank, clapping Jesse on the shoulder.

"It's better than a show."

"Ten times."

"Well, let's go and see what we have taken in by this haul."

"Agreed."

"Where'll we go?"

"To the bushes."

"Come."

They galloped back to the wood from whence they had issued but a short time before, and Jesse James lighted his lantern and placed it on the ground.

They tied their horses and sat down by it.

First, they took the wallet and unrolled it. There was a great fat roll of bills, a considerable sum of coin and some papers. Then they took out a letter.

"Why, what's this?" said Jesse.

"A letter."

"Yes, it has been sent him by some one; let's read it."

"Go ahead."

"We can't be accused of robbing the United States' mails if we do read it."

"No."

Then Jesse read the letter. It was from the old man's son evidently, and concluded with:

"I will stay at the old house as long as you wish it, father, but I think you ought to have some one with me. Why do you keep so much money about here, anyway? Why not place it somewhere else? I might be robbed at any time. Forty thousand dollars is entirely too much for one person to have in such an old house. It would be safer in the bank."

"Your son,

"FREDERICK WILLIS."

"Frank."

"Jess."

"We've got a bonanza."

"We have."

"Let me see. By the letter it is not over six or seven miles there, is it?"

"No."

"Let's do the job to-night."

"Agreed."

Each understood what the other meant by the job, for the James Boys knew no other name for business or work than robbing. There was various kinds of robbing, bank robbing, train robbing, stage robbing, robbing on the highway and robbing houses. It all came under the general head of business to them, and they had almost come to regard it as legitimate.

"We'll make a fat thing out of that young bachelor," said Jesse James, with a laugh, as they went over the road at a gallop.

"Yes, and we'll soon be there."

"I wonder if he lives alone."

"I suppose so."

"With some servants, perhaps."

"Perhaps."

The screech owls perched their shapely bodies in the leafless branches of the tall dead oaks, and the wind sighed a mournful requiem through the leaves of the forest trees. The cry of the coon or whistle of the nighthawk alone broke the silence.

They were off the main road now riding through a lonely path which ran through a dark wood. Like most forests in the west it was filled with dead trees, which, stripped of their bark, stood weird and ghost-like, extending their naked arms in the air. But Jesse and Frank were not superstitious, and had no dread of these weird-looking objects.

"Hark!" said Jesse.

"Aha, you hear it too."

"Yes."

"I thought for the last five minutes that I heard horses' hoofs ahead."

"There's no doubt."

They reined up their horses a moment to satisfy themselves beyond a doubt, and Jesse James said:

"Do you know what I believe about it?"

"What, Jess?"

"I believe it's that old fellow we robbed."

"Why should he be on this road?"

"Going to warn his son."

"But why should he know that we were on our way to rob him?"

"Well, you see that he knows that we have taken the letter from him which he received from his son. He knows that we will, no doubt, act upon it, and go to that old house just as soon as we can."

"I see your logic."

"Isn't it sound?"

"Yes, but if it is him, what are we to do, kill him?"

"Well, now, that depends somewhat on circumstances, Frank. I don't think it best to kill anybody as long as we can help it. We must leave that for the last resort."

"But how are we to get rid of him?"

"Oh, we might tie him."

"To a tree?"

"Yes, and leave him there until we have done our work."

"But won't he scream and yell?"

"Well, we'll gag him. Tie a handkerchief over his mouth."

"That's a good plan. Suppose we ride on now and overhaul him?"

"A good idea, Frank."

They put their horses to a gallop, and were not long in discovering they were overhauling the horseman on the road ahead of them.

The loud clatter of hoofs reached the ears of the man before, and evidently filled him with dread, for the James Boys could hear him yelling:

"Get up! Get up!!"

"Frank, it's he."

"Your surmises were correct, Jess."

"They usually are."

Down upon the fugitive the James Boys swooped like hawks upon a fat duck which spreads its wings and tries to waddle away.

"Oh, don't, don't, don't! Go away and lem me be!" groaned the old fellow, as Jesse and Frank galloped up, one on either side of him.

"Hold on, uncle."

"Hold on, you knaves. Haven't you robbed me? Haven't you taken all I have got, and now what more do you want?"

"We want to talk with you."

"Me?"

"Yes," Jesse answered.

"Talk with the man you basely robbed?"

"Oh, uncle, don't call it by that harsh name. Call it by something more mild. Say collected road tax from instead of robbing. You see we are men of fine feeling."

"Yes, you feel gold, I see, whenever you can get your fingers on it. Oh, I tell you, you are knaves."

"Uncle, we want to know where you are going?"

"It's none o' your business," roared the fat old fellow, his face almost livid with rage.

"But, we beg your pardon, it is our business."

"Why?"

"Do you tell us where you are going and what you going there for, and we may come to an understanding."

"Well, then, if you must know, I am going to see my son."

"You took the notion rather late, didn't you?"

"Well, I am going there."

"You were not going there when we first met you?"

"That is an affair that concerns you not!" cried the old man, who was in a furious rage.

"I beg leave to differ with you."

"Well, I've no more to say."

"You won't talk no more?"

"No."

"Say, uncle, wasn't you just going to your son to tell him to get the forty thousand dollars out of the house just as soon as possible, because two men had robbed you and were in possession of his letter mentioning the forty thousand dollars?"

The old man's face grew deathly white in the starlight, and striking his horse a cut with his cowhide riding whip, he yelled:

"Get up—get up, Ball! Oh, John! John! John! look out, they are coming!"

The fat old horse sprang into a gallop, and from a gallop to a run, while the enraged and badly frightened old man continued shouting:

"Look out, John, look out for they are coming."

Jesse and Frank both burst into a loud laugh. Their well trained racers were soon alongside the fat, puffing horse of the old man, and Jesse, laying his hand on the rein, said:

"Don't be in a hurry."

"Take that."

Swish came his riding whip across Jesse's shoulders.

"Hold on."

Click, click, went the lock of a revolver, and the muzzle of death was pressed against the old man's forehead.

His hat had blown off in his flight, and his hair seemed actually standing on end.

"Oh, oh! don't, don't shoot!"

"If you have any brains in your head, and care to keep them there, you will be a little more careful about your whip."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Dismount."

"Oh, are you going to take my horse?"

The James boys both laughed.

"What could we want with that lazy fat plug of yours," Jesse answered. "No we don't want him. Dismount and we will inform you just what we want of you."

"All right, boys, but remember now I am an old man, and I ain't got more than a few years more to live anyway. Spare me, won't you?"

"Oh, we are not going to shoot you, get down."

The old fellow alighted and stood at the road side trembling.

"Frank, take off the reins of his bridle and let the horse go."

"All right."

Frank James sprang nimbly to the ground and began to follow his brother's instructions.

"What are you goin' to do?" bawled the old man. "Oh, I see it all now, you are going to hang me."

"No, we are not."

"What are you going to do?"

"Tie you?"

"Tie me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"We don't want you to get to your son's house before we do, for we don't care to have him apprised of our coming."

"Oh, don't, don't, don't—"

"Come, come; none of that nonsense," cried Frank James, pushing him toward a large oak tree. "We'll see that you don't harm yourself or anybody else."

The old man stood close up against the tree, and Frank tied him hard and fast. When he came to gag him the old fellow raised a particular objection, and kicked and struggled until Frank delivered a stunning blow on the side of his head which somewhat calmed him down.

He was tied and gagged, and his old horse stoop close by his side nibbling the grass and weeds.

Jesse and Frank James mounted their own horses and galloped away. Half a mile from where they had left the old man, they crossed a creek and proceeded along the road which led up the bank for some distance.

"There's the house, Frank," said Jesse, halting.

"On the hill."

"Yes."

"I see it now. I can just make out the quaint old gables in the starlight. Well, how are we to do?"

"Get a little nearer and see."

They rode to a grove of oaks, which grew on the side of the hill, but a few rods east of the house. Here, Jesse purposed that they dismount.

They made their horses fast to some young



trees and crept a little closer to the house. A dog began to bark.

"We must silence him, Frank."

"But, we don't dare shoot him."

"No, the report would rouse the young fellow we don't want roused yet."

"Then how are you going to manage him?"

"Leave it to me."

Jesse pulled off his coat, and winding it around his left arm, crawled through the grass and bushes as near to the house as he could. In his right hand he held his keen-bladed knife.

The dog saw some strange object crawling and rolling in the bushes, and he began to sniff the air rather mysteriously. Then with a yelp he bounded toward it. His mouth, wide open, met the left arm of the bandit, around which was rolled the coat, and the jaws closed on it.

Quick as a flash of lightning, straight and sure, went the blade of the knife to the heart of the dog. One sharp, yelping cry, and the beast rolled over on the ground, dead.

Jesse dragged it out of the path into a thicket, and watched the house a long time to see if the man there had been aware of the death of his faithful guard.

But yet all was quiet, and the bandit king found the coast clear, and creeping still nearer, he reconnoitered more closely. In one window there was a light, and crawling up under the window, he looked in to see who was there. It was the young man. He had black eyes and hair, like his father, and a jet black mustache was on his upper lip.

Near him was a bed, and he rose and threw himself on the bed without undressing.

Jesse James was a little puzzled just how to make the attack. He went back to where Frank was and told him of the situation.

"Isn't there a cellar under the house?" asked Frank.

"Yes."

"Maybe there is a trap door in the young fellow's room."

"By Jove—there is!" Jesse answered. "Since you have called my attention to it, I remember now having seen a trap door in the very room in which my young man is lying."

"Why couldn't one make his way to him that way?"

"It can be done—it's the very plan, Frank. Now, while I do it, do you guard at the window."

"All right."

Jesse then disguised himself with a wig and a fierce black beard.

Having done this, he went to the outside door of the cellar. It was locked, but he found a stout stick near at hand with which he broke off the padlock and opened the door.

Lighting the small dark lantern which he nearly always carried with him, he descended the steps and entered the cellar. Here he paused for a moment and looked about. The cellar was full of old barrels and boxes, decaying vegetables, and old timbers.

Jesse at last discovered a short flight of steps ascending to some apartment above, and knew that they must go to the young fellow's room.

"I will follow them and see."

He went up the stairway, holding his dagger in his right hand and his dark lantern in his left.

He reached the trap, boldly pushed it open, and raised his head and shoulders above the level of the floor.

"Who are you?" cried the young man, leaping from the bed.

"Old Satan," answered Jesse James, displaying his long, sharp-bladed dagger.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AT THE OLD MILL.

"BACK down to the regions of darkness from whence you come," roared the young fellow, who at once surmised the robber's intent.

At a single leap the bandit king sprang upon him and hurled him back on the bed.

"Lie there."

"What do you want?"

"I want silence and no resistance on your part. I want correct answers to everything I ask."

"Do you intend?"

"It all depends on the manner in which you demean yourself."

"What do you want? Why do you come here in that manner?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Oh, I fear—"

But he caught himself before he had uttered the words. Perhaps the awful man, who had gained admission to his apartment in such a

mysterious manner, was after all not what he most dreaded.

"Now, keep still," said Jesse. "Don't you dare move, or I might hurt you." He placed his lantern on a dresser and went to the door, which was locked and bolted on the inside.

He found the key in the lock, and unlocking it, drew back the slide and opened the door.

This done, he struck upon the table three times with the butt of his revolver, and in response, Frank James appeared.

"Have you got him, Jess?"

"Oh, yes."

With widely distended eyes the handsome young fellow sat on the side of the bed gazing at his visitors.

"Well, what do you think of us?" Jesse asked.

"Who are you and what do you want?" he gasped.

"We come from your dear father."

"My father!"

"Yes. You wrote him a letter, you remember, in which you stated to him that you were a little mite nervous about the money."

"What!"

"Oh, you remember, don't you, of saying that you thought forty thousand dollars too big a sum to be kept in the house?"

"Y—yes."

"We think so too."

"Do you?"

He was now glaring almost insanely at his visitors and trembling in every limb.

"Yes, we do, and we have come to take the money from the house. It's really not safe here. You were perfectly right when you said so."

"But I—I have changed my mind. I don't want it removed. I want it right here."

"You are wrong."

"No, I am right."

"You must consent."

"I won't."

"Then we'll use force."

"What right have you to take my money?"

Jesse James drew a chair right up in front of the youngster who sat bolt upright on his bed gazing at him, and seating himself in the chair, leveled a revolver at the head of the young man.

"Do you know," said the bandit king coolly,

"I am one of the best shots in America."

"I—I—don't know—please don't point that this way."

"I have bored many a fellow as young and good-looking as you are between the eyes."

"Oh don't, don't."

"I know just how to hold a pistol in order to do it."

"I don't doubt it, but—"

"I have only to touch the trigger with my finger and you are dead."

"Oh, please don't!"

"Now let's get to business. Where is the money?"

"Robbers!" groaned the young man.

"The money—where is the money?"

"Oh, don't—don't!"

"Where is the money?" this time a little more firmly and a little more determined, while the hand that held the pistol seemed to grow rigid.

"Oh, don't! Won't you let up on me?"

"I will if you will tell me where the money can be found."

"Oh, I don't know."

"Young man, you stand right on the brink of death. In a second more you may be plunged into eternity. Do you want to make the terrible leap to an unknown world with a lie on your lips?"

"Oh, no—oh, no, no! Don't!"

"I am a man who is not to be trifled with. I have sent a hundred men into eternity for refusing to answer questions just such as I am asking you."

"Who are you?"

"Jesse James."

"The James Boys, then I am indeed undone," cried the poor wretch.

"You are, unless you obey me and tell me where the money can be found."

"I will, I will."

"Hurry up, then."

"Do you see that door by the chair near the foot of the bed and to the left of the shelf on which the bottle sits?"

"Yes."

"Well, open it."

Jesse rose and did so, but he saw only a closet in which hung a few old coats and a hat or two.

"I see nothing here," he answered. "Frank, keep a close watch on the prisoner, and kill him if he tries to escape."

"Trust me for that," Frank answered, "and

I am not the least bit squeamish about sending a bullet square through his head."

"Oh, please don't talk that way," cried the trembling wretch.

"But we had just as well have you understand how things are."

"I don't want to be killed."

Then from the closet came the awful voice of Jesse James, saying;

"He has lied."

"I did not."

"You did."

"About what?"

"You said the money was in here, and I don't find it. We'll hang him up by the toes until we wring it out of him."

"Oh, don't, pray don't, Mr. James," cried the young fellow, in despair.

"Well, speak out, then, where is the money?"

"It is in there."

"You have lied about it."

"No, I have not."

"I can't find it."

"In the left hand end of the closet you will find a button. Press it and a panel will draw down out of sight revealing a few pigeon holes made in the wall. In those you will find the money."

"Can you see the button?" asked Frank.

"No, it is too dark."

"Get your lantern."

"I will, and if he has lied to me I will kill him this time. I don't care what may happen."

"I have not lied. If you will let me come I will show you the button."

"Oh, no, he only wants a chance to get away," said Frank.

"No, I don't. I tell you truly, I will show you the button."

"Watch him Frank, and make him sit there on the bed. If he has told me the truth, I can find the button, and if he has not I will shoot him and put an end to it."

"Oh, don't, don't."

"Tell me the truth, then."

"I have told you the truth."

"You are in no danger."

"But you might not see the button."

"Yes, I will."

"It is very small."

"What color?"

"Black."

"Then I'll find it, have no fears."

"Oh dear! oh dear, oh dear, if the button should fail to work, or something was to go wrong, I should be killed."

"You are right," said Jesse picking up his lantern and going into the closet.

He was provokingly cool and hummed an air as he went to his closet. He seemed as careless and indifferent about the life of the prisoner as if it was only the liberation or captivity of a bird.

The poor wretch sat groaning and suffering martyrdom, expecting almost every moment that he would be hurled into eternity.

He listens to Jesse as he hums a popular air and hears him rummaging about in the closet. He wonders what he is doing and asks himself if the bandit is really trying to find the button.

"Oh, if he would only let me I would show it to him," he groans.

"We can kill you and then find the button," Frank answers with a cough.

"Please don't talk that way."

"Why?"

"You make my blood run cold."

"We'll make it colder still."

"Oh, don't!"

Click! came a sound within the closet.

"There, he has sprung the button!" cried the prisoner, with a sharp cry of relief.

Jesse could be heard still humming an air. It was a popular air, and he seemed to enjoy it. He was indifferent and careless, always at his ease.

"Have you found it?" called the prisoner.

"What did you ask?" returned Jesse.

"Have you found it?"

"Oh, you mean the button?"

"Yes."

"I did."

"Does it work?"

"Pretty well. A little rusty, that's all."

"Then I am saved?"

"Well, that depends on circumstances."

"What?"

"I haven't counted the money."

"What do you mean?" demanded the prisoner.

"Mean it may not all be here."

"Do you hold me accountable for the amount?"

"You bet I do," and then Jesse mockingly hummed:



"Oh, them in whose presence my soul takes delight,  
On whom in afflictions I call,  
My comfort by day, and my song in the night,  
My hope, my salvation, my all."

"Suppose it should be short," asked the prisoner.

"Then I'll make your neck long," and he sang:

"Where dost thou at noontide resort with thy sheep,  
To feed on the pastures of love,  
Oh, why must I still in the valley here weep,  
Or alone in the wilderness rove?"

His heartless indifference, cool audacity and mocking song made the young fellow's blood run cold.

"Well, here we are," said Jesse, at last, emerging from the closet.

"Have you the money?" Frank asked.

"Yes."

"All?"

"I have not counted it yet."

"What'll you do if it's short, Jess?"

"Do? Why, we'll make him tell where the remainder is hidden."

"There is no remainder," cried the prisoner. "I'll swear that's all."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"We'll count it and see."

Jesse then poured the money, gold and paper bills, on the table and proceeded to count it.

"There must be forty thousand here," he said pausing in his work. "You said in your letter to your father forty thousand, and a dollar less will have to be accounted for."

The young fellow wrung his hands in an agony of spirit and groaned:

"Great Heaven! I may possibly have made a mistake."

"If you did it will cost you your life," said the bandit king.

"Oh, don't be too hard on me. I don't want to be killed."

"But you had better make your peace, for I believe it's going to run short."

When he counted the money out, however, it was a few hundred dollars over forty thousand, and Jesse said:

"That will save you."

"What are we to do with him?" said Frank, as his brother began tying up the money in a large bundle.

"Serve him as we did his father. Let us gag and tie him."

"Good."

"Oh, don't," pleaded the prisoner.

"Are you any better than your father?" Jesse asked.

"My father, what of him?"

"We served him that way."

"My father, where is my father?"

"Tied to a tree and gagged so he can't speak."

"Oh, let me go to him."

"Not much."

Despite all his pleadings they tied him hard and fast and gagged him.

This done they gathered up the money and put it into two bags.

Jesse took one bag and Frank another, and they went out to their horses.

As they were mounting they were alarmed by hearing a voice not far from the old house saying:

"Right up this path, Mr. Timberlake, bring your men right up this path."

"Jess!"

"Frank!"

Both spoke in a whisper.

"Thunder is to pay."

"That's the old fellow we tied."

"Yes. Timberlake has been on our trail and found him."

"Come on, boys, keep your hands on your guns and let 'em have it as soon as you see one of them."

"All right."

Jesse and Frank could hear them slowly creeping up the path, and both knew that they were in deadly peril.

"This way, Frank," Jesse James whispered, and they wheeled their horses into a path that led down the hillside in an opposite direction from the house. They had not gone far before Jesse James discovered that the trees and bushes had grown so low that they would be seen when riding.

"Dismount, Frank."

Both dismounted, and led their horses down the narrow pathway, going very carefully so as not to attract the attention of their pursuers.

They had just gained the bottom of the hill

and put their feet in the stirrups to mount, when a loud yell from the house reached their ears.

"The old man has learned it all," said Jesse, "and now we may look out for trouble. They will follow us to the jumping off place."

They rode slowly at first until a few hundred rods from the house, and then at a gallop keeping along the banks of the Little Blue, until two hours had passed.

Frank then said:

"I am tired, Jess."

"I shouldn't wonder. We've been in the saddle fourteen hours."

"I want three things."

"Rest, food, and sleep?"

"Those are what I want."

"Hello! What's this? An old mill."

"Yes. It's the mill on the Little Blue."

"You are right."

"Well, let's stop. It's deserted and has been idle for years. Why can't we put our horses in the lower part of the building and creep up in the attic to sleep?"

"I believe we can."

"I don't think Timberlake will follow us further to-night?"

"No. We gave him the slip quite easily."

They dismounted, led their horses into the old mill, and after securing their animals went into the attic of the old mill to sleep.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AFLOAT.

THE James Boys were sometimes reckless, and it was certainly one of their reckless moods which induced them to go up in the attic of the old mill and both lie down and go to sleep.

They found some straw there and spread their horse blankets over it, thus forming excellent beds for men who had all their lives been used to living the life of a soldier.

They slept soundly for some time. Jesse was perhaps the lightest sleeper of the two, and about midnight, or perhaps an hour later, sleeping though he was, he heard his horse give utterance to a snort of uneasiness.

Jesse knew there was danger near, and in a moment was awake.

"Frank!" he whispered, laying his hand on his brother.

"What's the matter now?" Frank James asked, starting up.

"Whist!"

Jesse placed his finger on the lips of his brother to enjoin silence.

"Whist, Frank!" he repeated, in a scarcely audible whisper.

"Timberlake?"

"I expect it is."

Jesse rose to his feet, and Frank drew his revolver.

Both crept to a window which overlooked the road. There was a window on the other side of the apartment in which they had been sleeping, but it overlooked the creek which flowed below them.

"Do you see anything?" Frank whispered, as Jesse peeped out.

"Yes."

"What?"

"Dark forms line the road."

"Do you know who they are?"

"Timberlake and his band."

"Are they?"

"There is no doubt. I see the big sheriff now, and I've a notion to send a bullet through his head and put an end to him."

"Don't do it, Jess."

"Why! don't you want him killed?"

"Of course, I do, but you know that a single shot there would tell them where we are, and we'd be taken in."

"By ginger, they seem to know where we are."

"Do you think they do?"

"Well, they are coming very straight this way."

"Oh, Jess, I hope they won't get us."

"So do I."

"But maybe they won't."

At this moment a voice below which was unquestionably Timberlake's was heard saying:

"Now, lads, look sharp. Be careful how you move about here for we can't be very far from them."

"No," another answered. "Frank and Jess are desperate and would as soon shoot a fellow's head off his shoulders as not."

"Right you are."

"So keep your eyes open."

"Frank, let's open fire," Jesse whispered.

"Oh, no, not yet."

"They are sure to discover us anyway."

"Maybe not."

"They can't help it."

At this moment a voice which came from the ground floor of the old mill was heard calling:

"Timberlake—here, Timberlake."

"Yes, what is it?" Timberlake asked, "what have you found, Uncle George?"

"Their horses."

"Their horses! Then, by Jemany crant, you can be sure that they are not far off," cried a short, stout old fellow, taking off his hat to scratch his head, the top of which was almost perfectly bald.

"That's old Sol Kitchen," Jesse whispered.

"Is it?"

"Yes; I would have killed him once if the limb of the tree on which I was resting my knee had not broken."

"It's a great pity it broke."

"I have always thought so."

The starlight revealed at least a score of men, and among them Dick McCabe, Timberlake and others, all of whom were the sworn enemies of Frank and Jesse James.

"Jess, can't we escape?"

"How?"

"By the south window."

"That overlooks the water."

"What of that? We can swim."

"Yes; but let's see what they are going to do now?" Jesse answered.

Jesse James was really anxious to open fire on the sheriff and his posse and stand them a fight, but Frank knew how dangerous, and, in fact, how useless such a thing would be, so he objected to anything of the kind until they would be compelled to do so.

"Do you watch here, Jess, and let me reconnoiter the rear window," said Frank.

"All right."

"Now, Jesse, don't fire unless you are compelled to."

"I won't."

"Be careful."

"Oh yes I will."

"Don't shoot among them until I come back. You are so reckless I am afraid you will do something desperate and terrible."

"Oh, go along, Frank. Do you think I am such a great fool?"

Frank slunk away, lest his brother's voice might be elevated in anger until it would be heard by some of the men below.

He went to the opposite window and looked out. It was fully twenty-five feet to the water, and it was so dark that at first he could not see the surface of the water. But he gazed a long time, and by and by, as he became more accustomed to the darkness, his eyes discovered, down close to the side of the wall, a small boat.

It was large enough for two, and he was certain if they could only get down to it they could escape by floating away down the stream.

"But how are we to reach it," Frank asked himself.

In the meanwhile Jesse James was watching the sheriff and posse below. They seemed a little taken aback by the discovery of the horses below, and knowing that the James Boys were not far away, every man was a little dismayed.

To meet the James Boys meant death. This every one knew, and though they outnumbered them ten to one, it made no difference. They knew them to be dangerous, deadly, and they held them in great awe.

Jesse James was a host in himself, and with a brace of Colt's navy revolvers in his hands was equal to a dozen deaths.

Frank, though not so courageous, manly and brave as Jesse, was a creature to be feared. He held human life in very light esteem, and when hemmed fought with all the ferocity of a tiger.

"I tell you they are not far away if ye've got their horses," repeated Old Sol Kitchen, slamming the breech of his rifle down upon the ground.

"Sol is right," put in Timberlake.

"Where do you say they are, Timberlake?"

"In the old mill."

"They are not down here with the horses," answered Uncle George.

"Then they are up-stairs."

"Go up and get 'em, Sol."

"Oh, no, you kin excuse me," Old Sol answered, taking off his hat and wiping off his bald head with his handkerchief. "I'm not afeared to meet Jess in open daylight on the road, when I've got a good Winchester in my hand, but I don't want no truck with him after night, an' him in a house."

"Well, they are in there," said Timberlake.

"I know it."

"And we've got to get them out."

"Yes."



"How are we to do it?"

There was a moment's silence, and Dick McCabe, who was always nervous and anxious for a fight, said:

"Let's all make a dash and overpower 'em."

"Overpower 'em—thunder!" grunted old Sol Kitchen. "To git at 'em ye'd hev ter go up a narrer, windin' stair, an' d'yer know what they'd be er doin'?"

"Fight, of course."

"They'd choke up that air passage with dead men faster'n yer could pull 'em out ter save yer lives."

"No, they wouldn't."

"They would."

"We're twenty to two."

"But they're made o' revolvers, an' each man'd be er speakin' volcano, so he would."

Jesse James drank in eagerly every word that was said, but he most specially watched Timberlake. The others were small compared to that giant, and his opinion, the bandit king knew, would prevail.

"Less surround the old mill and guard it till mornin'," suggested Sol.

"Starve 'em out," put in another.

"That's it."

"Yes."

"Lay in the bushes and woods or behind rocks and lay siege."

"Of course."

"Open fire on 'em."

Old Uncle George Nelson had been listening attentively to all they said.

He shook his old gray head and remarked:

"It won't do, boys."

"Why?"

"I know 'em."

"So do we."

"They'd get away."

"Well, what'll we do?"

"What does Timberlake say?"

Timberlake had not yet been appealed to, but now the posse turned to the big sheriff, who had been standing idly by, his arms folded across his breast.

"What do you say, sheriff?" asked one. "Do you believe they are there?"

"Yes."

"In the old mill."

"Yes, they are in the old mill."

"Quite sure of it," said old Sol Kitchen.

"I know it. There can't be any doubt of it."

This point then was settled. The James Boys, beyond a doubt, were in the old mill.

"Well, Timberlake, what's your plan for getting 'em out?" asked Uncle George.

"Just like we get wolves out of a den."

"Smoke 'em out?"

"That's it."

"That's it, boys."

"Hurrah!"

"All right."

"Gather up the fagots."

"It's no use to wait longer," thought Jesse James. "If that big sheriff is mortal man, I will make him immortal."

Jesse leveled a cocked revolver at Timberlake. It was so dark, that he could not see very clearly, but he knew he would hit that big body somewhere. He pulled the trigger, and a stunning report shook the air.

Timberlake reeled backward, staggered by the shot, and came near falling, but he caught on to a tree and supported himself. Realizing his danger he sprang behind the tree, placing himself out of danger of a second shot.

"Am I hit?" he asked himself. "Of course I am. I felt the ball strike me somewhere, but where? It was on the body, and now let me see where upon the body it hit me. The blood must be flowing somewhere."

He felt over his person, but he was in no pain, and found no blood. About his waist was a sort of peculiar numbness, which he could not account for until he found a bullet half-embedded in the handle of his pistol.

This accounted for his escape. The shot had not struck him, but hit his pistol and saved his life.

"Are you hit, sheriff? Are you had hurt, Timberlake?" cried a dozen men.

As soon as he could get his breath, which had been almost knocked out of his body by the shot, he answered:

"No, I am not had hurt. Take care, all of you. Get to cover."

The men sprang to cover.

Crack!

"Aw, oh!" and old Sol Kitchen leaped fully four feet into the air.

"What's the matter, Sol?"

"The cuss burnt my shoulder!" old Sol roared.

"Bad hit?"

"I'm not so hit but I'll spile his mug yit!" roared old Sol, stamping the earth with his foot and swearing vengeance. "Oh, I'll make him rue the day he was born, I will, I will, I will!"

During the next few moments old Sol performed some wonderful feats, leaping, dancing, and talking brimstone by the ton.

"Does it hurt you, Sol?" asked Dick.

"Hurt!" roared Sol, jumping and stamping the earth with his feet. "Do you think I am doing all this for fun?"

"Look out or he will harm you again."

Everybody kept close to cover for the James boys were dreaded. Old Sol Kitchen could be heard groaning, kicking and swearing and imminent as the danger was, there were several laughing at the old fellow's rage.

Suddenly the heavy boom of guns sounding like a cannon rang out on the air. Old Sol had fired at Jesse James.

"Aha, Jesse, how d'ye like that?" he roared.

"I guess yer not goin' to have it all yer own way."

The ball went crashing through the side of the window about five inches from Jesse's head.

Frank James in the meanwhile had been looking about for some means of descending. He found it. It was a long pole with a hook on the end of it. What it had ever been used for he could not determine, but it was long enough for his purpose, and he swung it down, fastening the hook on the window.

Then it was long enough to touch the water.

"Jess, Jess," he cried, come quick.

The sheriff and posse had all opened fire on the mill and the bullets rattled like hail against the window.

Jesse crept on his hands and knees to Frank.

"What, Frank. Where are you?" he called.

"Here I am—let's climb down this pole, there is a boat down there."

"Will the pole hold us?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"Will you follow?"

"I will."

Frank descended the pole. All the while Timberlake's men were firing like fiends into the old mill.

The bullets splintered and tore the weather boarding, and came through on the inside, but Jesse and Frank both miraculously escaped.

They descended the pole, dropped in the boat, and floated out down the stream.

## CHAPTER X.

### A RAID.

"We are out of danger now, Jesse," Frank said, as their boat glided past the mill and around a bend in the stream.

"Don't be too sure of it."

"Why, they are still firing on the house."

"So they are, but they may get tired of that."

"What do you mean, Jesse?"

"When they find no shots returned they will conclude that we are dead or gone, and in either case will search the mill. Besides, Frank, we have no horses."

"That's so."

"Now I want my horse, and I am going to have him."

"How?"

"Go back and get him."

"Nonsense, Jesse! you are too rash."

"Perhaps I am, but I am going to make an effort to get my horse."

The boat glided on for several minutes and the bandit brothers were silent.

Jesse found a paddle in the bottom of the boat, and, taking it up, began to paddle along the stream, hovering near the shore.

"Are you going to land?" Frank asked.

"I am."

"Why?"

"We are safer on the land."

As they were running their boat into shore they were startled and not a little alarmed at hearing the clatter of horses' hoofs coming along the road which wound about the river.

"Jesse, Jesse, do you hear that?"

"I would have to be deaf not to hear it."

"They are coming this way."

"Yes, and a goodly number of them there seems to be, my brother."

"I believe you. But they came from below; and we left the Timberlake posse above."

Jesse James had discovered that fact long ere his brother had, and it puzzled him not a little. He was for a moment at a loss what to do, but at last he ran his boat under some willows and there they lay down listening to the approaching horsemen.

Long years of experience had given the James

Boys such skill in guessing at the number of horsemen from the sound of their horses' feet, that Jesse, as he lay there in the bottom of the boat, screened by the overhanging willows, was sure that he counted at least eight distinct horsemen.

Some one was talking in an undertone, but they could not distinguish what was being said:

"Here, let's water our horses here," said a voice, which caused both Frank and Jesse to start.

Frank began to raise up in the boat, but his brother, who was always more prudent, as well as more brave, seized him by the head and pushed him back.

"Lay down."

"But—"

"Whist!"

Jesse was one to be obeyed, and Frank knew it, so he lay down in the boat.

"Very well," answered another voice. "Let us water our horses here."

"Come on, then."

Down to the water's edge rode the horsemen, and their horses were allowed to drink within ten feet of where the concealed bandits lay.

There was a momentary silence, broken only by the sucking in of the water, and then the horseman or one of them said:

"I wonder where Jesse and Frank are?"

"They are giving Timberlake a chase as like as not."

"But they get the best o' the sherriff."

"Well, Cole Younger, ye might ask where is Timberlake."

Cole Younger shrugged his shoulders for a moment and answered:

"I don't know now that I am particularly hunting Timberlake."

"No, I guess not."

"We'd rather find Jesse and Frank."

"Yes. If we are going on that raid it is time we started."

Then came another interval of silence.

Though these men were Jesse's own comrades, he realized that it would be dangerous to speak and make himself known.

So quick on trigger were they that his voice would not be recognized ere they would be riddled with bullets.

They lay still, and the cavalcade having watered their horses wheeled about to ride up the hill. Then Jesse James raised his head a little and called:

"Cole, Cole Younger!"

He dropped his head the moment he spoke, and it was well for him he did.

Next second a pair of bullets came whistling over the side of the boat, and had Jesse's head been raised above the rim, he would have been shot through.

"Hold on!" cried Cole Younger.

"Who is it?" asked Dick Little.

"Jesse James."

"The chief."

"Yes."

"And you boys a shootin' at him!"

"Maybe ye've killed him."

"No we haven't," Cole answered. "I know Jesse too well. He can't be knocked under so easily."

Then as he rode down toward him he called:

"Jesse—Jesse James!"

"Yes."

"Is Frank with you?"

"He is."

"What are you doing?"

"Hiding from Timberlake."

"What! Is that scoundrel close about?" asked Cole Younger, who was Jesse James' lieutenant.

"He is right at hand, or was. We were hemmed in at the old mill, and I came very nearly taking the life of the wretch, but it seems my bullet hit the butt of his pistol and saved him. We made our escape in the boat and left them blazing away at the mill."

"Come out."

They climbed to the bank.

"How many have you, Cole?"

"There are eight of us."

"Where were you going?"

"Looking for you."

"Is there some work on hand?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"The bank at Atterville is full of money. The vaults are crammed to bursting."

"Well, what are the chances there?"

"Good! The danger is slight and the reward will be great. We have determined to make the raid, providin' it meets your approval."

"I think it will," Jesse answered, "but first of all, we must do something with Timberlake."

"How many men has he with him?"



"Twenty."  
 "Only twenty?"  
 "That is all."  
 "And he is at the old mill?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Well, we are ten now, and two to one against us are odds in our favor," said Cole Younger with a laugh.  
 "Cole is right."  
 "Well, boys, if you think we can make the fight we'll charge on them, because I want my horse."  
 "Is it Siroc he has captured?"  
 "No, another. I have not seen Siroc for weeks."  
 "You haven't—where did you leave him?"  
 "In Kentucky."  
 "Then, Jesse, I have good news for you."  
 "What? If you have good news for me, for

And panting they hastened up the hill. It was fully three miles instead of two to the old mill, and when the banditti reached the place they found it deserted. Timberlake's posse and Frank's and Jesse's horses were gone. The James Boys were quite in despair over it, but two of their comrades took them up behind them and in this way they rode to the home of a friend who loaned them horses until they could get their own from the home of Dr. Samuels, their father-in-law. Jesse and Frank kept their adventure with the old farmer a secret, as they did not care to have it known that they had over forty-one thousand dollars among them, which, according to the laws of the band, should have been divided. One day while they were recuperating at the

"Well, here is forty-one thousand dollars unaccounted for."  
 Jesse James took a cigar from his vest pocket, nibbled the end for a moment and lighted it. Then he said:  
 "When we are together doing business together, we, of course, are partners, and all share alike. When we are acting individually we have nothing to divide."  
 "That is your ruling."  
 "Yes."  
 "Well, when I picked up five thousand dollars a few weeks ago I was compelled to divide."  
 "The cases were entirely different," said Jesse with a smile. He was unmoved by the manner of his lieutenant.  
 "They were exactly alike."



"Jesse James, I swore I would kill you before twenty-four hours, and now I will." He fired, and Jesse James fell from Siroc. Frank caught him before he touched the water.

Heaven's sake, give it to me, for if ever a poor wretch needed a batch of good news it is I."

"Siroc is at your mother's."

"What?"

"Your brother John went to Kentucky for him."

"Let me once get on his back and I will hunt down old Timberlake and tear his scalp from his head."

"But if Timberlake is so near let us get after him right now," said Bob Younger.

"Young blood is quick and rash, but we need have no fears of them in this case," said Jesse. "But boys, what are Frank and I to do? Fight on foot?"

"I suppose so."

"We can run along on foot until we come to the old mill, and then we'll get our horses," said Frank.

We should have stated that the James Boys, all through the perils of fight and escape, had clung to the money they had stolen from the old man and his boy.

They did not care to let their companions know of the prize, as they would have to divide with them.

Forty thousand dollars, even though a majority of it was in paper bills, was no light load. The coin was all in twenty dollar gold pieces, and Jesse and Frank found it weighing heavy on them as they ran along in front of the horses.

"Don't complain," Jesse whispered to his brother. "Never let on, for if you do they will want to know the cause and then we will have to divide with them."

"All right."

house of their friend, Cole Younger disguised himself and went to the nearest town to pick up such news as he could and buy whisky, of which he was very fond.

While there Cole bought a paper which contained an account of Frank and Jesse James robbing the old man of over a thousand and his son of forty thousand dollars.

As Cole Younger read the story he slapped his knee and remarked:

"That accounts for some of the mysterious things about them," said Cole, with a frown. "I have always known that Jesse James could not be trusted, and now I know it. He is a knave even among bandits, and I have come to doubt that there is any honor among thieves."

When he went back that night to the house where he had left Jesse and Frank, he walked into the room where the former sat and thrusting the paper under his face, said:

"Do you see that?"

Jesse read the paragraph without a single change of countenance.

"Well," he said, laying down the paper.

"Have you read it?"

"Yes."

"What does it mean?"

"I guess it means what it says."

"Is it true?"

"Yes."

Then Cole Younger scowled at the chief, and after a few moments asked:

"Jesse James, are you admitting that you have broken an established law of the band?"

"How?"

"All money taken is to be divided."

"Yes."

"Now, Cole Younger, we are about to engage in a raid on a rich bank, and this is no time for us to engage in a quarrel. The good of the band demands that we remain friends."

"Yes, and I am willing to remain so."

"Then why get up a discussion on such technical questions? Let it go."

Cole Younger burst into a laugh, while Jesse James continued to read his newspaper, as though he was very much unconcerned in the matter.

Cole turned away, muttering to himself:

"I have always believed that the James Boys were unscrupulous, selfish and dishonest, and now I am quite certain of it."

They waited but two days when the horses came, and then preparations were made for the final raid on the Atterville Bank.

Jesse, mounted on his coal black steed Siroc, rode at the head of the procession.

They left in the night, and traveled all night, halting at daylight near the place of contemplated robbery.

"We are ten in number," said Jesse James, as they rested that day in the woods, "and we need have no fears of any party we may meet there."

"When will we do it, Jess?" asked Cole.

"My plan is to wait until three o'clock, P. M., and then gallop down on the town."

"Let us disguise."

"Every man must wear a black mask over his face."

"A mask?"

"Yes."

"Why not a beard?"

"Well, a beard might do, but I think so many black masks would strike terror to them."



"We haven't got the masks."  
 "Oh, I have provided everything."  
 He pulled out the masks, and displayed them to the bandits.  
 "Jess looks out for everything."  
 "Now, boys, we are provided with three days rations, and the corn fields and grass give plenty of food for our horses, so no one is to go near a house."  
 "That's it, no one is to go near a house."  
 "Or be seen."  
 "Jesse is right," put in Cole Younger.  
 They had long been accustomed to campaigning, and it was no trial to the restless spirits to lie there in their little camp in the thicket.  
 The sun rose and passed the meridian. Jesse James looked frequently at the hands of his watch.

"Run in your houses. Fly for your lives. Go or you'll all be swept from the face of the earth."  
 Everywhere men, women and children ran screaming in fright.  
 And the banditti raiders swept down like a cyclone upon the bank.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A STEAMBOAT CHASE.

"Dismount, Cole," cried Jesse as he sprang from his saddle.  
 "All right."  
 Cole did so.  
 "Here, Frank, hold our horses."  
 "Aye, aye."  
 "All the others keep up a steady fire on the streets. Sweep everything out of sight."

"Now, Cole, see what is here."  
 "All right," Cole answered, with a laugh.  
 "This is the most delightful business we have ever followed, my fine fellows."  
 "Go ahead, Cole. Gather up all you see and I will keep guard," said Jesse.  
 "Ay, ay."  
 "Have you your bag?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Fill it."  
 "I am."  
 "Do you find much?"  
 "I should say an excellent haul."  
 All the while loud shouts and yells could be heard without.  
 The citizens of Atterville, having in a certain measure recovered from their first shock, were beginning to rally.



"Murderer, whar air ye?" roared the granger. "Here I am!" cried Jesse, flashing the light on the granger. "Take that!"

Their plan was to rob the bank just before the hour of closing, as then they would have most deposits in, and besides, it was their policy to have the night as near as possible, for they stood a better show of escaping at night.

"It's three," said Jess.  
 "Saddle your horses," commanded the lieutenant.

This was done in a few moments.  
 "It's time to mask," Jesse remarked, at the same time pulling a mask on over his face.

"Don your masks," cried Cole.  
 "It was done."

Then Jesse led out Siroc, and putting his own foot in the stirrup said:

"Prepare to mount."  
 Cole Younger repeated the order, and every man placed his left foot in the stirrup, and Jesse cried:

"Mount."  
 All orders were given in an undertone, and executed with as little noise as possible.

There was a few moments giving directions, and then the banditti broke up into twos and rode away in different directions.

At half-past three two horsemen appeared on the hill east of the village. At first no one noticed that they wore masks on their faces and in fact but little attention was paid to them.

But suddenly one took off his hat, waved it in the air, and gave utterance to a yell.

Then it seemed as if all the demons in perdition had broken loose and with wild yells half a score of mounted men, every one wearing a black mask on his face came thundering down the hill sides to the town.

"Bang, bang, bang!" rang out volleys of pistol shots while the horsemen cried:

"Aye, aye."

Then the whoops and yells and rattling crash of firearms was resumed. It was a terrible day for Atterville, as three or four of her citizens were hit and fell weltering in their blood in the streets.

"Follow me, Cole."  
 "Lead, and I will be at your side."

The two men burst into the bank.  
 "Great Heaven, what do you want?" cried the amazed and horrified cashier.

"I surrender."  
 "Don't shoot."

"Hands up, all of you."  
 The clerk who was at a far desk became frightened and started to fly.

"Sit down."  
 "Never."

"He runs, Cole?"  
 "Yes."

Bang!  
 The clerk had only got to the rear door when the sharp report of a pistol rang on the air.

The bank was so full of smoke for a few moments that no one could see anything, and when it had cleared away they discovered a dark form lying still and silent in the doorway.

"Oh don't, don't, don't kill any more," groaned the cashier.

"Then surrender."  
 "I do."

"Sit down in that chair."  
 The outlaw pushed the prisoner back into a chair, and Cole Younger seized a cord which lay in the bank, having been taken from a package that had been but recently opened.

He tied the cashier hard and fast to the chair, in such a way he could not get up.

A boy had seized an old army musket and ran into a school-house. The school-house was a stone building, and from one of the upper stories he fired at the masked men.

Although he missed the mark at which he fired, the shot seemed to encourage others, and men were everywhere seizing guns.

"Jesse, Jesse," called Frank James.  
 "What?"

"Hurry up."  
 "Why?"

"They mean fight?"  
 "Do they?"

"Yes."  
 And at this moment, like a thunderbolt, came a posse of mounted men down the hill north of town.

"Timberlake! Timberlake!" cried Frank.  
 "Cole!"

"What?"  
 "We must get out of here."

"All right; I am ready now."  
 "Have you about got everything?"

"Yes, everything except fifteen cents, which fell down in under the counter."

"Let them have that."  
 With a bitter laugh Cole Younger answered:

"It's all they will get."  
 "Come on—come on—come on!" cried Frank James.

Swift as the wind the robbers rushed from the bank, mounted their horses, and away they flew.

"There they go—there they go!" roared a wild chorus of voices from the village above, and upon the ears of the fleeing men came an earth-trembling roar of hoofs.

Jesse James was in the lead.



Siroc was inexhaustible, and his speed far surpassed any other animal belonging to the band. Frank, on his famous Jim Malone, rode next, and after them came Colo Younger and the others.

Jesse knew he had only to say the word to his famous horse, and the animal would have distanced everybody, but Jesse determined to remain with them.

Not that he was entirely true blue to his companions, but because Jesse in fact loved a fight, and was certain that they would soon have their pursuers scattered along the road for miles, and then they could turn on the advance guard and annihilate them.

"Yes, I see him," cried Jesse. "Cole do you observe that he's well mounted?"

"Who?"

"Timberlake."

"Yes."

"Do you think he can overhaul us?"

"He may overhaul some of us."

"Well, then we'll fight?"

"Yes."

"Why not now?"

"Not yet."

"Why?"

The thunder of the hoofs kept up such an uproar, that they were forced to speak loud and make their sentences as short as possible.

"They are stringing out all along the road," said Jesse.

"Yes."

"Those poorly mounted are constantly falling behind, and we will soon have not more than half a dozen within two miles of us."

"I suppose so."

"Then we'll turn on them."

"Oh, yes, I see."

"I am glad that Timberlake is so well mounted."

"He takes the lead."

"Yes."

"We'll have him on some of our boys soon."

"Ride on."

Jesse drew out to one side of the road to allow the others to pass.

"What are you going to do?" Frank James asked.

"Go on, never mind me."

The cavalcade flew by with the speed of the wind.

"Hurry up, boys, ride like furies!" cried Jesse James, to those who were behind.

"Our horses are doing their best," answered Dick Little.

"You and Wood Hite must keep up."

"We can't."

"First thing you know Timberlake will be on you."

"Then it will be a fight."

"Ride on, and I will check him," cried Jesse.

"Ay, ay!"

Then they galloped away, and Jesse stopped Siroc.

The noble animal knew that he would have some exciting work to perform, and while he stood as still and motionless as some great black statue carved out of stone, he trembled from head to foot.

Jesse James gazed coolly down the broad turnpike at the foes coming toward him at a furious gallop. They were still some distance away, and he was in no hurry.

The setting sun threw a few rays of splendor over the scene. The valley was lovely, and the rays of the sun fell on the village church spires.

On one side of Jesse was a rail fence, and on the other side a wood. A hog was contentedly grunting in the fence corner, and stopped under a projecting rail to scratch its back, on which was the half dried mud from its wallow. Its wallow was but a short distance away, half mud and half water, with a very disagreeable smell.

Jesse was in no great hurry; he dismounted and tightened his saddle girth, and then, with his eyes fixed on the approaching enemy, patted Siroc.

He stooped and picked up some acorns and threw them to the lazy swine, which gave a grunt of thanks and slowly crunched them beneath its powerful jaws.

Timberlake saw all this coolness, all this defiance, and was exasperated.

"Jesse James, I will cure you of your audacity!" he yelled.

Though Jesse had not taken the mask from his face, the bandit hunter recognized his horse, the famous Siroc.

"Come on!" was the defiant answer.

The sun was going down behind the horizon, and Jesse's band had disappeared over the hill. The bandit chief was alone, but he was untroubled at the knowledge.

He had the utmost confidence in Siroc, and knew that even though the enemy should crowd him close, he would soon outstrip them. They were come quite close now, and he quickly snatched his revolver from its scabbard and prepared for the arrest.

He cocked his pistol and deliberately leveled it at Timberlake.

Though the giant sheriff was a good way off, he knew the unerring accuracy of Jesse James' revolver and checked his horse.

Bang!

Sharp and keen the stunning report cut the air. The bandit's bullet struck up the dirt beneath the feet of the sheriff's horse causing the animal to rear up in the air, whirl about on his hind legs, and but for the iron arm of Timberlake he would have darted off in flight.

But the sheriff held him hard and fast and returned the shot.

The bullet went wild. It struck on the other side of the road, glanced and hit a stake beneath which the pig was rooting. The porker gave a terrified squeal and ran to the next corner.

Jesse James laughed.

"Come on!" roared Timberlake to his followers. "Bring me a rifle."

"A rifle!" cried Jesse; "then if they are to bring a rifle I had better get away."

He knelt down upon one knee, took a deliberate aim and fired.

Timberlake staggered backward and dropped out of the saddle.

"Ha, ha, ha! killed at last!" cried Jesse James, who felt that he was fully repaid for his danger and waiting. The bullet, however, was spent when it struck Timberlake. It hit him on the chest, striking a button and bouncing back.

Yet it came with such force as to bruise him, and knock the breath out of him.

Jesse put his foot in the stirrup, and Siroc stood stamping the ground in his impatience.

"Woa, boy! We've killed Timberlake, and now we can take our time."

But he was to be disappointed. In a moment Timberlake was on his feet.

"Bring me a gun, bring me a gun," he roared, in a voice that was by no means weak. "Hurry up with a rifle and I will put an end to the villain."

"Only a spent shot after all, Siroc," said Jesse. "Well, old boy, we must bid them adieu."

Lightly the bandit king vaulted in the saddle.

"Hold on, Jesse James! Wait a moment," thundered Timberlake, "and we'll have you secure."

"I am sorry, Timberlake, but I can't wait," he answered.

"Hold up, you coward!"

"Why do you stop?"

"Wait till I get my gun."

"Coward, I have no rifle."

Timberlake was furious. He raised his long range pistol and fired.

But haste and anger made him a bad marksman. The bullet struck on the other side of the road, so near to the pig as to make him squeal.

"Hold on, Timberlake, you will hurt that pig. If you don't quit such reckless shooting you'll hurt this pig on the other side of the road."

"Jesse James, I will kill you before twenty-four hours," roared Timberlake.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You shan't live to see the sun rise, I swear it."

"Ta, ta, Timberlake. You had better go home to your wife and children."

"You had better be making your peace, your hours are numbered."

And with a laugh, Jesse wheeled Siroc about and was gone like a flash.

Five miles ahead he overtook his companions. They now came to the river.

"Jesse," said Cole, "we ought to cross it."

"Yes."

"Can we ford it?"

"The river is very swift here. A little further up we might."

"It's growing dark."

"Yes."

"Perhaps it would be better to wait until morning."

"I don't know, we might be surrounded and cut off then."

"Yes, and yet I don't think the danger of waiting will be half so great as the risk of going across the river to-night."

"Can't we capture a ferry?"

"And make it take us over."

"Yes."

"Of course we could," Jesse answered.

"There is but one difficulty."

"What," asked Cole.

"Get your ferryboat."

"Well there must be one somewhere."

"Of course there is, but whether it is one mill or a hundred we don't know."

"This is the Missouri river and we ought to find a steamboat somewhere."

"A steamer will no doubt pass up the stream sometime."

"If it does we can capture it."

"But when will a packet be along?"

"That was a question no one knew, as packets don't run regularly on the Missouri river."

After long discussing the question, Jesse James finally said they would have to wait until daylight.

"It's a very dark night, and we are unacquainted with the country. To go on would be dangerous, and I see no better way than to wait."

"You are right," said Cole.

"The night is very dark," Frank put in.

"Very—it's awful," said Wood Hite.

"I wonder why it got dark so suddenly."

"The sky is overcast."

"And we'll have rain."

The ten men, grouped together under the muddy banks of the great Missouri river, were by no means comfortable. The air was damp, raw and chilly.

There was little or no wind, and the night seemed oppressive with silence.

For hours the men sat or squatted about in a circle on the damp ground.

Jesse James at last rose and stood by the side of his horse.

A damp drizzling rain, half mist and half rain was falling.

It was just a state of atmosphere as is most calculated to make a man miserable.

"Do you hear anything?" Jesse at last whispered.

"No," said one.

"I don't know," said another.

"I thought I did. Yet I am not altogether certain."

"Well, I am certain," said Jesse.

"What was it?" asked Cole Younger, rising to his feet.

"I am not certain."

"Is it near?"

"No, it's a long way off."

"The captain has the ears of a fox," whispered Clell Miller to Ed McMillin.

"Yes."

Then a few moments more of silence followed, and Jesse James said:

"Jim Cummins."

"Well."

"I want you."

"Where?"

"Come with me."

"Are you going to reconnoiter, Jess?"

"Yes."

"Will we want the horses?" asked Jim.

"No."

"All right."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Are your pistols dry?"

"Dry as powder. I've kept them out of the damp all the time."

"Well, that's good."

Then they left their steeds and companions and crept slowly up the slippery muddy bank of the stream and went up a path which led up the river.

"Jim, have you heard anything yet?" Jesse asked.

"I am not sure," Jim answered.

"I am convinced that our pursuers are not far away."

"Would you attack them to-night, Jesse?"

"If we can get them divided," Jesse answered.

"Well, I hope we can."

"Are you eager for a fight?"

"If we can kill Timberlake I am."

"He is hard to kill," said Jesse. "I have tried him and I know."

"Well, what's your object now, Jess?"

"I want to find out how many men he has with him, and what their intentions are," Jesse answered.

Like a good general Jesse James always believed in getting the points of the enemy and then outwitting him.

Strategy is frequently worth more than valor, and Jesse knew it. He was resolved to take every advantage possible of Timberlake, and if hazard a battle he meant to go in for the death. Ruin and death awaited captivity, and he



would fight to the bitter end rather than be captured.

Suddenly Jesse, who was in front groping his way along a path through plutonian darkness, came to a halt and put up his hand for his companion to halt.

"What is it, Jess?" Jim asked, as he ran against his chief.

"Stop!"

"What is it?"

"Do you hear nothing?"

"I believe I do."

"Listen!"

"All was silence, and Jim Cummins bent his ear close to the ground to listen.

"What do you hear?"

"Talking."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, that only stronger confirms me in what I have all along believed."

"How far are they away, Jess?"

"I should say a mile."

"A mile?"

"Yes, fully."

"Well, I believe you."

"We must get nearer. There is but little wind to-night, but thank fortune, what little there is blows from them to us."

"Yes, and we have the bluff in our favor. It brings back every sound directly to us."

"You are right."

They again began advancing.

Slowly and cautiously they crept along the path, groping their way with their hands, and in constant danger of being plunged headlong down some bluff or precipice to death below.

Jesse was cautious as a fox, brave as a lion, and dangerous as a tiger. When he sprang it was a death leap, but he was careful not to spring until he was sure of his victim.

On, on, and on they groped their way through the darkness.

To Jim Cummins, anxious, nervous little fellow as he was, it seemed as if they would never reach the end of this long, desperate journey.

Jesse continued going on, on and on, groping his way.

Jim could not see him, but he heard the slight noise he was compelled to make, and for most of the time was compelled to keep his hand on his shoulder in order to keep up with him.

At last Jesse halted.

The voices in conversation could be heard talking louder and louder all the time, and Jesse James knew they were not a great way from them.

"Jim, don't you hear them?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Plain?"

"Very plain."

"Listen now, and see if we can catch their words."

They both listened, and then a voice could be heard, saying:

"Halt!"

Then a silence.

After a few moments a voice was heard to say:

"We can't go any further to-night, sheriff."

"No," put in another.

"We are like blind men."

"It's dangerous to go another foot."

"You are right it is, Timberlake."

"Wait until morning, and we are with you."

"You bet!"

"To the end!"

Jesse James strained his ears to catch a word from Timberlake, but as yet the big sheriff had not opened his mouth.

There was a confused jabbering of men, as if a dozen were talking at once, and then one said:

"Well, sheriff, what do you say?"

A momentary silence followed, and Jesse James strained his ear in his deep anxiety to hear what answer his bitter enemy, Timberlake, would make.

"Well, boys, we ought to go on."

"But we can't."

"It's dark, I know."

"Of course, and we might tumble off this bluff."

"Yes, and who knows but what the James Boys are lying ahead of us with revolvers ready to shoot us down as we creep up on them."

"Ugh!" grunted another. "I feel all the time just as if I was running right onto 'em."

"So do I."

"I've thought half a dozen times I could feel the muzzles of their revolvers poking in my face."

"So have I."

"Well, we'll stop," said Timberlake.

"Then wait here until daylight?"

"Yes. Hold your horses and let 'em graze."

"There's nothin' to graze on but stones, sand and mud," chuckled one fellow.

"Well, wait anyway, be ready to mount as soon as daylight comes."

Jim Cummins heard this and anxious to return, was tugging away at Jesse's coat.

Jesse seized his hand and by a squeeze indicated that he was to wait a few moments.

"What's to be your plan when daylight comes?" one of Timberlake's men asked him.

Oh, how earnestly and anxiously Jesse James waited for the answer. He scarcely breathed, he was so anxious for the answer.

Timberlake was rather slow about answering. Had he been a good general he would not have answered at all, but, while the big sheriff was brave as a lion, he was a very poor general.

"My plan, I think, will be to scatter out along the river and hunt them down; then we'll concentrate and sweep 'em in."

"Good enough," Jesse thought. "We'll stay together and whip you in detail."

He then indicated to Jim that they would go back.

Both turned around.

"Jim!"

Jesse whispered in a voice so low that even Jim could scarce hear him.

"What, Jess?"

"Make no noise."

"I won't!"

"Let me go before."

"All right; come before."

"Now put your hand on my shoulder and follow."

"Remember that a single misstep or stumbling over a stone might ruin all the bright prospects that are in store for us."

They had gone for a long time groping in the dark, Jim Cummins holding to Jesse's shoulder. The low hum of voices had died away in the distance and become silent, and Jim Cummins now knew that there was little danger of their being heard.

"Jesse, what bright prospects have we," he asked.

"Didn't you hear him say they would scatter in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Well, we will attack and whip them in detail."

"Will we?"

"Of course, we will succeed too, but Jim just keep you rattle-box closed and follow. We must get back."

It was a long and toilsome journey.

The rain became more steady and the night, if possible, darker. They could see nothing, and the heavy mud and clay accumulating on their feet made walking decidedly slavish and laborious.

They actually stumbled right in among their friends before they were aware they were near them.

"Well," said Cole Younger, "what did you find?"

"We found them."

"Timberlake?"

"Yes."

"How far are they away?"

"A mile and a half I should judge," said Jesse. "It may not be so far."

"This rain is bad."

"Yes. Boys, keep your revolvers dry, for we are going to need them in the morning early."

There was a murmur of assent among the tired, sleepy outlaws.

The night wore slowly away, and, to the waiting men, it seemed to be endless.

But at last day began to dawn.

Jesse James was filled with anxiety.

"If I only had my band on the other side of the river," he said to himself, "I could defy them. But here we are completely hemmed in on every side; it begins to look serious."

Day dawned slowly. The clouds began to roll away, revealing the dark turbid stream flowing beneath them.

"Boys, awake!" called the chief.

"Awake, thunder! No one was asleep!" growled Wood Hite.

"Look to your saddle girths!"

Every man gave his attention to his saddles. They still wore their masks, for though the James Boys knew they would be followed, they did not care for their pursuers to see their faces.

Jesse ordered a mount.

It was now daylight.

The sun was rising as the banditti galloped around a curve in the road and approached a low part of the ground where the sand bar

sloped far into the river and made the river quite narrow.

"Look, there's Timberlake," cried Cole Younger. "Timberlake, mounted on a big white horse."

"Yes, and only two others with him," cried Jesse. "Now I'll have my revenge. Boys, drive them into the water."

Timberlake saw them coming and fired his rifle but missed.

The James Boys pressed them closely and Timberlake's companions by ascending a steep embankment escaped.

Seeing himself cut off from his followers, the doughty sheriff with a yell of defiance struck out across the river. For a long distance the water was quite shallow, coming only up to the animal's sides.

The big white horse which Timberlake rode was brave as the sheriff, and plunged boldly into the water.

"After him," roared Jesse James, and the whole band plunged into the water, Jesse in the lead and Frank next.

At this moment the loud puffing of a steamer could be heard and a packet could be seen coming up the river.

"Capture the boat," cried Cole Younger.

"Aye, the boat."

"Kill Timberlake," roared Jesse.

At this moment Timberlake turned in his saddle, his revolver in his hand, and cried:

"Jesse James, I swore I would kill you before twenty-four hours, and now I will." He fired, and Jesse James fell from Siroc. Frank caught him before he touched the water.

"He has killed Jesse," roared Frank.

"Kill him! Kill him!"

Timberlake's big white horse was a strong swimmer, and struck boldly across the stream. Timberlake slipped from the saddle, and holding by the animal's mane was carried along by his side.

The beast and rider heard the whiz of bullets about their heads, but were so low in the water there was no danger of being hit.

On, on they held their course.

Jesse James was still breathing.

"He may not be dead," said Cole Younger.

"Make for the boat—seize her!"

But the boat ran aground and they were forced to swim across the river with their insensible chief.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A LIVELY CHASE.

"Is Jesse dead?" half a dozen asked at once, as soon as they reached the shore.

"No," Frank answered.

Frank had carried his brother across the river. "It's only a slight wound," Jesse returned himself, regaining his consciousness at this moment.

"Oh, Jess, I am so glad," cried Cole Younger.

"I thought you were done for that time."

"Where is he?"

"Who?"

"Timberlake."

"He landed here."

"When?"

"But a few moments before us."

"And you let him escape?"

"We thought only of you, Jesse."

"After him."

"How many shall I send?" asked Cole.

Jesse, who had been hit in the right side, and had bled considerably, raised himself to a sitting posture on the sand and said:

"Take Jim and Clell Miller and go and kill him."

Cole Younger and the two named mounted their horses and galloped away toward a lane in which Timberlake had disappeared.

"Now the boat, Frank."

"It's aground."

"Confound it; just our luck."

"Do you want us to capture her yet?" asked Dick Little.

"No—what do we want with a boat here?"

"I don't know."

"I am sure I don't."

"Hello! there they come," said Bob Younger.

"Yes," said Wood Hite.

"They see us now."

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! came distant guns.

"What in the name of torment does it mean?" asked Jesse, who was reclining on the sand.

"Timberlake's men on the other side of the river are firing at us."

Some of them had long-range rifles, and the bullets struck the sand up about the James Boys.



"Let's get away," said Bob Younger.  
 "All right."  
 "Jesse, can you ride?"  
 "I don't know."  
 "Let us carry him."  
 "No—no! I would rather ride if it kills me than be carried," said Jesse.  
 They put him in the saddle, and, though he was very weak, Jesse rode well.  
 "Boys, take off your masks," he suddenly cried.  
 "Why?"  
 "We are going to scatter as soon as the others come back."  
 "But we have not divided our money."  
 "We will when they come."  
 They went up in the wood and halted.  
 In a few moments Cole Younger and his companions returned and said Timberlake had escaped.  
 Jesse was furious for awhile, and spoke harshly to Cole Younger and his companions.  
 "We couldn't help it," said Cole.  
 "Couldn't help it!"  
 "No."  
 "Why didn't you run him down and shoot him?"  
 "Because he outran us."  
 Jesse became quieter after a few moments and told Frank to divide the money they had taken from the bank the day before.  
 When each man had got his share their chief said:  
 "Now my advice to you is to unmask and disguise yourself as best you can and scatter."  
 They all assented.  
 Frank and Jesse went together, disguised as old men. Jesse's wound was bound up, and the bleeding stopped, and those whom he passed on the road never dreamed that he was suffering the agony of death almost every moment.  
 They reached a friend, where they waited until Jesse had partially recovered, and then went to their mother's. Mrs. Samuels was always ready to welcome home her sons and screen them, and fight for them if need be.  
 Never was a tigress more desperate than the mother of the James Boys. She was familiarly known in Kearney as "the old she-devil."  
 In a few days Jesse was quite himself again. He was of that nature that recuperates rapidly, and was seldom long in bed with a wound.  
 While his brother was slowly recovering Frank James spent the time in riding about the country and gathering up what news he could relative to their enemy Timberlake.  
 One day Frank had returned from Kearney, whither he had been incog., and had put Jim Malone in a stall alongside Siroc and gone to the house.  
 Jesse, who had spent most of the sunny day in the yard under the locusts or watching the road for some sign of a sheriff or enemy, went in the house to meet and consult with his brother.  
 "Well, Frank, where were you?" he asked.  
 "To town."  
 "Kearney?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Learn anything?"  
 "No."  
 "Where is Timberlake?"  
 "Well, that's not known."  
 "You tried to find out?"  
 "Of course."  
 "Did you see Mallony?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Didn't he know?"  
 "No."  
 "Then he can't be in the neighborhood, for some of our friends would surely find it out if he was."  
 "I think so, Jesse, and yet we can't always tell, you know. The sheriff is a bold, dangerous man, and he has shrewd tricks and schemes."  
 "I wonder if he knows I was not killed."  
 "I believe he does."  
 "Why?"  
 "I read an interview a reporter had with him in Kansas City."  
 "Did you?"  
 "Yes."  
 "What did he say?"  
 "He said that he was satisfied his shot did not kill you, and that you were a pretty hard man to kill."  
 "I'll give him credit for having good sense."  
 "Yes, I wish he didn't have quite so much good sense."  
 "He would be easier for us to manage."  
 "You are quite right he would."  
 "Do not relax any of your vigilance, for of the day and hour when Timberlake comes no man knoweth."

"There you are right, brother."  
 Mrs. Samuels now appeared and told her hopeful sons that dinner was ready.  
 "All right, mother, and I am quite ready for it," said Jesse.  
 "Mother, you are a treasure," cried Frank.  
 "Oh, hush, and come to your dinner before old Timberlake comes to run you away from it."  
 "No danger of his coming now, mother."  
 "Yes, there is."  
 "No, I have scoured the country."  
 "There is always danger," put in Jesse.  
 "Oh, yes, in a general sort of a way, but I feel quite sure that old Timberlake is not within many hours' ride of us."  
 "Come to dinner," repeated the mother, leading the way to the dining-room.  
 Ay, what a place a farmer's dining-room is! Boiled pork and turnips, corned beef and cabbage, roast mutton and sweet potatoes, baked apples, boiled beans, stewed chicken with sauces, jellies, delicacies and everything calculated to appeal to the appetite.  
 "Here it is, smoking hot," cried Jesse, entering the dining-room. "Ah, mother, you are here."  
 "Shut your mouth, and sit down."  
 "Here I am," and Jesse flopped down in a chair by the table.  
 Frank took his place opposite him, and Dr. Samuels, who was always grave and silent unless driven into a conversation, took his place at the head of the table.  
 Mrs. Samuels sat down at the foot, and, after grace was said, poured out the coffee, while Dr. Samuels carved the meats.  
 "Where is John?" asked Mrs. Samuels. "Why ain't he here to dinner?"  
 "I told him to stay on the outside," Jesse answered.  
 "Why?" asked Frank.  
 "To keep on the lookout."  
 "It's no use."  
 "It is."  
 "It's not. Haven't I scoured the country, and don't I know that neither Timberlake nor Carl Greene, Pinkerton's detective, are near?"  
 Jesse was silent for a moment, and then he answered:  
 "We never know. What assurance have we that we may not be plunged into a fight before this meal is over?"  
 "None," answered Dr. Samuels.  
 "Then better have some one on the lookout."  
 "Well," cried Mrs. Samuels, her eyes flashing with deadly fire. "I will swear that if that old Timberlake comes here to shoot my children I will scald his eyes out."  
 "Ho, ho, ho, mother, you make an excellent cook, but I don't fancy you for a fight."  
 "Now, Jesse, I kin fight."  
 "You had better leave Timberlake to us."  
 "Yes," answered Dr. Samuels. "You had better let Jesse and Frank fight out their own battles. I don't see no need of us getting mixed up in it."  
 "Nor I," answered Jesse.  
 "Well, we'll fix Timberlake yet some sweet day," put in Frank.  
 "Yes, we'll give him a through ticket to the New Jerusalem, and he will be so well pleased with the country that he won't get back."  
 "Now you are talking."  
 "Jess, Jess!" whispered a voice at the outside door.  
 "What?"  
 "Who is that?" asked Mrs. Samuels.  
 "John."  
 John's head at this moment was thrust in the door.  
 "What is it, John?"  
 "Somebody's comin'."  
 "Afoot or on horseback?"  
 "Horseback."  
 "Alone?"  
 "No; there are three o' them."  
 "Three?"  
 "Three of 'em."  
 Frank and Jesse James both sprang to their feet, and Mrs. Samuels' cheek became blanched with fear.  
 Dr. Samuels rose calmly and deliberately, as he was in all things, and said:  
 "Boys, you had better look into this."  
 John had disappeared again, leaving the south door wide open.  
 In a moment his head reappeared, and he cried:  
 "Hurry, quick!"  
 "Bang!"  
 His sentence was cut short by the sharp report of a pistol.

A bullet whizzed through the house and smashed a mirror.  
 Mrs. Samuels uttered a shriek.  
 "Get back—get out of the way!" cried Dr. Samuels, seizing his wife and trying to drag her from the kitchen.  
 Jesse and Frank were startled by the clatter of hoofs as much as by the unexpected shot. In a second both had seized their revolvers and sprang to the south door and windows.  
 "Look sharp, Jess. Do you see anybody?" cried Frank.  
 "No—there goes a horse without a rider."  
 "I see the rider."  
 "Where?"  
 "He is squatting behind the big gate post."  
 "Yes, he is."  
 "Do you know him?"  
 "I do."  
 "Who is it?"  
 "Timberlake."  
 "Well, he's bold."  
 "He is—but look out!"  
 Bang! Crash!  
 A bullet pierced a window pane on Frank's left, and cut a round hole through it.  
 Jesse now from the partially open door fired three shots in quick succession, and the cautious sheriff kept so close behind the great post that the bullets grazed it and passed harmlessly on.  
 "Well, of all the audacity I ever saw," said Jesse. "Did he come alone?"  
 "No."  
 "Do you see others?"  
 "Great guns, yes! Just look over in the field, won't you?"  
 "Yes. There come a dozen."  
 Jesse and Frank both fired at the new-comers. A wild yell answered this, and a volley of bullets and buckshot rained against the house.  
 Then the men in the field made a dash under cover of the smoke for the house.  
 They leaped the first fence, crossed the lane and began climbing the second, or yard fence, when the breeze wafted the smoke a little and revealed them to the James Boys.  
 Crack!  
 Crack!  
 Two shots, a yell of agony, and one of them hobbled away to a tree and sat down to yell, curse and groan.  
 A second, who was on the fence, at the crack of the pistol rolled off into the lane.  
 "Pretty good," said Jess.  
 "We must git!" cried Frank.  
 "I know it. Are they between us and the barn?"  
 "No."  
 "Then we'll give 'em a lively chase."  
 "Agreed."  
 "Only once on our horses and we can bid defiance to them."  
 "You bet."  
 "Are you ready?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Come."  
 Mrs. Samuels knew what was wanted by her sons, and she herself opened the door.  
 They hurried from the house and ran for life toward the barn.  
 Three men who had been concealed in the trench not far off saw them, and ran to intercept them.  
 Two shots and one fell. The others retreated.  
 "Now for Siroc and Jim Malone!" cried Jesse. Timberlake realized what they were about, and in trumpet tones of thunder shouted:  
 "To horse, to horse!"  
 Jesse and Frank reached the barn, flung their saddles on their horses, and mounting them, away they flew like the wind.  
 "After them, run 'em down!" roared Timberlake.  
 And a lively chase began.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## BESIEGED.

HA, ha, ha! Come on, fools, come on!" roared Jesse James, wheeling about in his saddle and waving his hand aloft in the air. "You will be led the liveliest chase you ever had."  
 "On, on, on!" roared Timberlake, to his companions. "Don't spare your horses, but push the scoundrels out of existence. Drive them out."  
 Whoops and yells rang out on every side.  
 A rattling crash of fire-arms rang out.  
 Full a quarter of a hundred horsemen were in pursuit, and all had fired gun or pistol in that volley.  
 Mrs. Samuels, standing on her porch, shaded her face with her hands to watch the scene before her. Her sons were flying for dear life and



her breast was heaving with emotion while her chin was quivering with hate as she saw their pursuers hard on their trail.

Then when that awful volley came she held her breath and waited for the smoke to clear away. Surely horses or riders would be swept down in that volley, but when the smoke cleared away and she saw her sons riding far ahead, neither man nor beast hit, she uttered a wild shout of joy.

"Go on, you fools; you will never capture my Frank and Jesse," she cried.

Frank and Jesse had little fear of Timberlake.

"Good-bye, Timberlake; good-bye!" Jesse cried, waving his hat in a tantalizing farewell. Timberlake was almost furious.

He whipped his white horse and spurred him until his snowy flanks were red and dripping with blood. But Jesse and Frank were mounted on the fleetest steeds in the world.

"Siroc is even superior to my beautiful Light-foot," said Jesse. "They will have to change steeds often to run him down."

"Indeed they will," Frank answered.

"Over that hill and around that bend in the road and we will be out of sight."

"Yes, then we can disguise ourselves."

"Not yet."

"Why not?"

"See, the sun sinks rapidly. It will soon be night, and during the still watches of the night is the best time to disguise ourselves."

After a few moments reflection on the subject, Frank James came to the conclusion that Jesse was, perhaps right.

They rode hard for an hour, and then as all sign of pursuit had dropped back out of sight, Jesse and Frank rode into a thick wood which stood a few miles north of Kearney.

"I don't think any one saw us, do you Frank?"

"No."

"It's not much of a risk to halt and rest."

"No, not a bit."

They dismounted, and Jesse stretched himself and yawned.

"That little gallop made me sleepy," he said in his careless way.

"We have exercised our horses."

"Yes, a good bit."

"It's getting late."

"Right you are, my brother. See, the shadows are lengthening out, and the sun is descending."

"We'll pass the night in the wood."

That night was destined to prove an eventful one to the James Boys.

Their pursuers were closer on them than they imagined, and just as the sun dipped below the rim of the earth called the horizon, Jesse suddenly started up, bent an ear to the ground, and said:

"Do you hear that?"

"What do you hear, Jess?"

"A roar."

"Of hoofs?"

"Yes."

"By George! you are right, and they are not far, for, you see, the wind sets from us to them, and we will have to get up and travel, or they will soon be beating the dust out of our backs."

"I didn't expect this," said Jesse, and he and Frank vaulted in their saddles.

The faces of the James Boys both wore a look of uneasiness.

Timberlake had in some way managed to get fresh horses they were quite confident, for he could not have pressed them so close without a relay.

Away they flew.

Night came and the moon rose.

The moon was about at its full and gave forth abundant light. The James Boys found themselves being hemmed in by the law and Missouri rivers.

Jesse and Frank were in a desperate straight. The sheriff and posse were excellently mounted and pressing them close.

Siroc and Jim Malone were not refreshed enough to swim the river, and besides, they knew from past experience that Timberlake would follow them.

"Frank, we have been chased long enough by Timberlake," said Jesse.

"That's my opinion."

"I believe we had better kill him."

"I have no objections to make and no tears to shed when the deed's done," said Frank.

"Well, the truth is, Frank, we are in a close place and I believe we'll have to fight."

Frank raised himself in his stirrups and gave the country a quick survey and said:

"I've been here before, Jesse."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"Take the lead."

"Turn to the right we'll go up the river a way."

Away they flew. The moon shone with matchless brightness, and their foes, who were in pursuit, saw them however, and with tremendous yells pressed on after them.

"Ahead of us is a stone house," said Frank.

"Who lives in it?"

"No one."

"Deserted."

"Yes."

"Good, we'll fortify in it."

At this very moment the old stone house loomed up in the distance, and the bandit brothers pressed on up the hill toward it.

Jesse was first to reach the door. It was a wide door and open. He scarcely slackened Siroc's speed as they came to the door, but thundered right into the building.

Jim Malone, bearing his rider, followed.

"Now give it to them," roared Jesse. He wheeled about to one of the windows and rode close up to it.

The windows were old-fashioned, and high as well as narrow.

Timberlake and his band could be seen coming slowly up the hill.

Bang!

Sharp and clear rang out a shot from the window, and Timberlake's beautiful white steed made a frantic leap into the air, gave utterance to a groan of pain and fell to the earth, a bullet in his brain.

Timberlake kicked his feet from the stirrups and cried:

"Aha, they have been at last brought to bay, have they? Now, my brave boys, we'll have our triumph."

"Look out!" said Uncle George Nelson, who was cautious as well as brave. "A rat hemmed is more dangerous than a rat at large."

"I'll have Jesse's life now."

"Oh, don't—turn him over to my tender mercies," yelled old Sol Kitchen, reining in his horse and taking off his broad brimmed hat to rub his bald head.

"There is always catching before hanging," put in McCabe.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Three more shots from the old stone house.

Two whizzed harmlessly over the heads of the sheriff and his posse, but the third painted a blood red streak along the cheek of Old Sol Kitchen.

"Oh, aw, aw, aw!" roared old Sol, leaping from his horse. "I'll murder that Jesse James yet, now see if I don't murder him."

"Are ye burnt ag'in, Sol," asked one of the posse.

"Burnt thundration. D'ye think I'm adoin' all this for fun?"

"Dismount!" cried Timberlake.

He saw that they made too good marks for the outlaws when on their horses.

Every one obeyed.

"Now, hitch your horses down under the bank so as to be out of the way of bullets."

"Yes, for bullets are going to fly," added prudent Uncle George Nelson.

"You bet—and hain't they already flew?" put in Old Sol Kitchen rubbing his cheek which had been marked by a bullet.

"It's going to be a hot fight," McCabe said as he examined his revolvers.

How many of you have rifles? cried Timberlake.

There were eight rifles.

These he placed in front. Then four men had shot guns which he placed on the left.

The posse then opened fire on the stone house.

The men loaded and fired as rapidly as they could, and the James Boys returned the shots occasionally.

"What will we do with the horses?" Jesse asked. "They will be killed."

"I can get them down in the cellar," said Frank.

"Can you?"

"Yes, the stairway is broad and not steep. Siroc and Jim Malone are accustomed to such stairs."

"Yes, take them away."

Frank did so, and Jesse James next turned his attention toward the enemy who were besieging them.

"Hello, don't they keep close to the trees," Jesse thought. "Oh, for a good shot at Timberlake."

At this moment he saw a flash from the root

of a tree, and a bullet passed in at the narrow window, missing his face by two inches. The moon shone supremely bright on the scene, and the beleaguered men could see almost as plainly as if it had been broad day.

"Now, my fine fellow, I will try to cut your feathers," he said, cocking his revolver and aiming at the root of the tree.

Many of the posse had crept up close enough to the house for him to distinctly hear all they said.

"They don't return the fire," said one.

"No."

"Maybe they've deserted it again."

"No; this time they've not got the river to help 'em out. We've got the place entirely surrounded, so they couldn't escape."

"Maybe they are dead."

"Dead! Ha, ha, ha! No! The trick played us at the old mill ought to teach everybody a lesson different from that."

"Yes."

"They're alive."

"You can bet we are alive," Jesse James whispered to himself. "And if any of you doubt it, just dare to peep out from behind your hiding-place."

As if in answer to his ejaculation a dark round something appeared from behind the very tall tree which he had been watching.

"Now I'll bore it through or I'll quit the business."

Jesse leveled his revolver and took a deliberate aim.

He never missed at that distance, and with such an aim.

His finger pressed the trigger, a sharp report cut the air, and a cry of agony almost immediately followed. Then he heard the feet kicking spasmodically.

"Is anybody hit?" a voice asked across the other side of the path.

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Tom Scott."

"Bad hurt?"

"Don't know, but I believe he's done for."

"You are right," yelled Jesse, loud enough to be heard by all. "He is done for, and if any more of you want to be done for in the same way, please show your heads."

"Come out, Jesse James, and surrender!" cried Timberlake.

"Not much, if I know myself."

"You won't?"

"No."

"Then we'll have you if we have to tear down the house."

"You'll find that a tough job."

"Fire, boys. Blow down the house!"

A volley rang out, and the windows and sash were riddled. Many bullets pierced the door.

The siege had begun in terrible earnest, but the James Boys were game and fought like madmen, for they fought for life.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### AT THE BALL.

TIMBERLAKE and his posse were men who had long been acquainted with border warfare. Old Sol Kitchen and Uncle George Nelson were both veteran Indian fighters, and with their rifles wormed their way along the ground from tree to tree, shrub to bush, and bush to stone until they were dangerously near the stone house.

"As soon as it is daylight they will be able to shoot the buttons on our coats," said Frank.

"Frank."

"What, Jesse, do you get another aim?"

"No—but I was thinking we will have to get out of here."

"Get out—yes, but thunder! how?"

Jesse was silent for a moment and then he said:

"There is but one plan; it's a bold one and full of danger, but it offers us a show."

"What is it?" Frank asked.

"That is to bring our horses up here and throw open the double door, dash through them at a charge, cut loose and stampede their own horses."

Frank was silent for several minutes, and Jesse, anxious to have his opinion, said:

"Why don't you say something? How do you like the plan?"

"Not at all."

"And why, pray?"

"Because we would be shot to pieces before we had gone a hundred yards."

Jesse was silent. He knew that it was a dangerous, terrible experiment, but it was the best that could be suggested at the time. After several moments' silence he growled:



"Well, Frank, it's certain death or capture here."

"So I guess it is."

"Why not make a dash for liberty?"

Frank in turn became thoughtful for a moment and said:

"Let's wait a bit, Jesse, and see if we can't devise some plan less risky."

"Frank, how long has it been since this house was occupied?"

"I don't know."

"Some of the furniture is here yet."

"Yes, almost all of it is here."

"Well, Frank, do you keep guard over the windows and doors and I will take a look about to see what kind of a shape things are in, any way," said Jesse.

There had come a lull in the attack. The moon still shone brightly and the sharp eyes of the James Boys caught sight of a head or hand or foot the moment it was exposed. Several had been slightly wounded, and old Sol Kitchen had another mark along the side of his bald head which made him sick, and determined not to expose that head any more.

"The moon will be down in an hour," Timberlake argued, "and we can then go to the house unseen. Once at the door, we'll force our way in and have them at our pleasure. In the meanwhile we will wait."

This waiting produced the lull which the James Boys knew, however, was only the calm before the storm.

Jesse James began roaming about the house in a cool deliberate way, as though he was in no particular hurry, and was searching for mere idle curiosity. The house had certainly not been long deserted, for on the kitchen mantle he found a candle in a candle-stick.

"I'll go down in the cellar and see what I can see," he thought.

So lighting the candle he went down in the cellar, Sirox and Jim Malone snorted uneasily at the waning light until they scented Jesse, and then they became quiet.

"Well, here are barrels, boxes and any amount of odds and ends," said Jesse James. "I don't know what we might use. Hello, what's this? a powder horn."

It was hanging on the wall, and on examining it Jesse found it to be a large powder horn full of powder up to the throat.

"I may use this."

On a shelf near by was a long piece of fuse, such as is used in blasting.

"Maybe I can use this. How would it do to put the fuse in the powder horn, light it and hurl it among them?"

Then he saw a gallon stone jug on a shelf, and it suggested a new thought to him. Why not fill the stone jug with powder and broken bottles, of which there were plenty.

"It's the plan."

In a moment Jesse was busy. He set the candle on a small table, and gathering up some thick bottles, broke them into fine pieces. There was some hemp lint in the cellar, and he crammed a considerable into the jug and beat it down. Then he put in some broken glass, covering the bottom, then more hemp lint, until that was covered, more glass and more lint until the jug was nearly half full.

Then he put in the fuse, which he tied to a piece of lead and dropped into the jug to the bottom.

Next he poured the powder in all around the fuse and mixed in more glass and more lint until he had the jug full up to the throat.

"There's fully three pounds of powder in there," said Jesse; "enough to blow up a house."

Next he got a cask and put a hole through the center of it, and ran the fuse through the cork, cutting it off about a fourth of an inch from it.

"The thing will paralyze when she bursts," laughed Jesse, as he carried his extemporaneously made hand grenade up the stairs to his brother.

"Hello, Frank!"

"Hello, Jesse."

"How are things running at the front?"

"All is quiet."

"They are waiting for the moon to go down."

"They won't have to wait long, for it will be out of sight in half an hour."

"Yes."

"Then it will be dark and they'll make a rush on the house."

"Let 'em make it we're ready, or will be as soon as you get the horses up."

"Shall I bring them now?"

"Yes."

Frank rose to go after them and discovered that his brother had something in his hand.

"Jesse, what's that in your hand?"

"A jug."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Treat Timberlake and his crowd."

"What is in it?"

"Powder and glass."

"What do you mean, Jesse?"

"Just what I say. I am going to jug the house."

He then explained in as few words as possible his plan to his brother.

"It's a corker, Jesse."

"It'll go."

"I know it will. You couldn't get a better plan for breaking through their lines."

"Come, now, Frank, the moon is not very high. Go down and bring up the horses."

"All right."

Frank was almost cheerful. Jesse, with that cool dauntless assurance, which was one of the great secrets to his success, sat by the window humming a low tune to himself.

"Well, the work will soon begin," he murmured. "Yes, and it will soon be over."

Jesse had been through so many trying ordeals in his life, that sudden and awful peril had no terrors for him, nor did it seldom disturb the equanimity of his mind.

Frank came up with the horses. He had taken the precaution to muffle their feet so they would make but little noise.

"Jesse!"

"Yes."

"We are here."

"All right. Look at the moon."

"Yes—it's below the tree tops."

"Ten minutes more it will be down."

Then they waited in silence.

Sirox and Jim Malone were standing side by side, waiting for the word.

The moon dipped out of sight.

"Mount, Frank," Jesse whispered.

"They are creeping up to the house. Hadn't we better open fire on them?"

"No—let 'em come, the nearer the better."

Jesse picked up the jug which had been setting on the floor.

Frank still lingered at his side.

"They are all coming," he whispered.

"Mount."

"Do you really mean it?"

"Of course. This is no time for jesting."

"All right."

Frank sprang into the saddle, and held his own horse with his left hand and Jesse's with his right.

Jesse James, watching from a dark corner, saw objects stealing forward.

It was too dark to make out any one of them, nor could he hardly tell whether they were human beings or not.

But he watched and waited with patience. Low whispers without were heard.

"Come on."

"They're gone."

"Gather there at the door."

"Be ready to all strike at once and have it off its hinges."

Jesse knew it was time for action.

He struck a match and touched it to the end of the fuse.

The thing began to phiz, and Jesse held it in his hand until it had burnt down to the cork. In five seconds more it would be down in the powder, when the result would simply be appalling to one holding the jug in his hand.

He stepped to the window at the side of the door, and quietly tossed the jug among a group of dark objects gathered at the door.

"Hello! what's that?"

"A stone struck Old Sol Kitchen."

"Knocked him—"

"Boom!"

The house shook from the explosion, and the great front door was blown down. One of the old chimneys toppled and fell.

Terrific as the explosion was Jesse James knew that he had no time to tarry. The powder would only burn the thin jug, and glass would only wound and confuse. He could not expect anything like extermination, and had no idea that any one had been killed.

But the explosion would so confuse them that they might escape.

The report was still ringing on his ears and echoing among the hills and trees when he ran to Sirox and leaped upon his back.

"Forward, Frank! Out of this!" he cried.

"Aye, aye!"

Then like a flash they swept out of the house over the crushed doors.

Their enemies, save two who had been prostrated by the explosion, were flying right and left in every direction.

Over the two fallen men the horses leaped.

The smoke was so dense, and every man of the posse near was so busy picking bits of glass out of his body and face, that they did not see the horsemen.

Down the hill toward the horses of the sheriff and his men flew Jesse and Frank.

"Frank!"

"What?"

"Club your revolvers."

"All right."

"There are but two guards. Take the one on the right."

Frank understood all. The two men guarding the horses heard an explosion, as if the stone house had been blown to pieces, and in their excitement were running up the hill to see what was the matter.

"Down!" roared Jesse.

And down came two revolver butts, one on the head of each. Both men lay sprawling on the road, bleeding and insensible.

"Put up your pistol and draw your knife," Jesse whispered.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Jesse and Frank had cut loose the horses. Then they discharged a few shots among them, causing them to grow frightened and rear and plunge, and make away in their terror.

Timberlake had some ugly cuts from the glass, and all his men were more or less injured by the explosion, so that Jesse and Frank's plan was not known until the horses were stampeded and put in full flight.

No effort was made to pursue the James Boys and Jesse and Frank got off without any further trouble.

They read in the papers next day of Timberlake and his posse being all badly scarred up, but no one was killed save one man, Tom Scott, who had been shot early in the fight. The circumstance only tended to prove to the world how desperate the James Boys were.

Jesse and Frank meanwhile, were stopping with a friend in the country.

They heard of a ball in the neighborhood and Jesse James determined to go.

"Don't do it, Jesse," cried Frank.

"Why? I can disguise myself so I won't be known, you know, and I'll have no end of fun."

"Your love of fun will some day be too much for you."

But Jesse disguised as a countryman mounted Sirox, and on the evening of the ball set out for the house where it was to be held.

He dismounted, tied his horse, and went into the house where dancing was going on.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A RIVAL.

"SEE hyar, stranger, who air yer an' whar did yer come from?" asked a great big strapping young granger, approaching Jesse James as he entered.

Jesse was dressed and disguised to look enough like a farmer to be one.

"My name's Zeph Siples, an' I'm from Bitter Crick," Jesse answered.

"All right, Zeph, put er thar," said the farmer claspng Jesse's hand.

"Erquainted round about these ere parts," asked the farmer.

"No, what's your name?"

"Me, why I'm Gny Diggs, Zeph, but everybody about here calls me coon."

"Why?"

"Cos when I was er boy yer see I went to skule an wore er coon-skin cap with er tail to it, an' everybody called me coon."

"Wall, d'yer like ter be called coon."

"Don't keer wot yer call me so I git thar 'n time. Now look ee hyar, Zeph, would yer like ter shake yer foot."

"Yes, but I don't know none o' the gals," Jesse answered.

"S'pose'n I gin yer a knock down ter some on 'em?" (meaning an introduction.)

"Guess I'd like it, wouldn't I?"

"Bought er number?"

"No. How much air they?"

"Only two bits."

"Wall, I ain't got much money, but I'll give two bits."

Jesse went up to the red-faced officious floor manager, who was in his shirt sleeves and had his sleeves rolled up almost to his elbows. He wore a straw hat on his head all the time.

"Want er number?" asked that official in a business like manner.

"Yes."

"Two bits."

"Here is your money," and Jesse threw down twenty-five cents.

"All right," and he looked over a mill note.



book and stuck the end of a short lead pencil in his mouth.

"Wot's yer name?"

"Zeph Siples."

"Zeph Siples, how d'yer spell it?"

"Z-e-f Zeph, S-i-p-u-l-s Siples, Zeph Siples," said Jesse. "I tell yer that's a hard name ter spell, but I'm a speller, I am."

The floor manager did not dispute with him, but wrote down the name and said:

"Yer number eighteen, Zeph."

"Am I?"

"Bet yer air. Come in next set too. Git yer gal."

Jesse now turned to Coon Diggs, as he was more generally known, and said:

"Now, Coon, can't yer get me a gal?"

"Dun know av any one."

"Coon, let 'in dance with Susan."

"I fetch her here."

"Well, what on it? Yer ain't in fur this set."

"Bn' Susan Dugger's my gal."

"Can't yer let er feller dance with yer gal?" asked Jesse, with a real country grin.

"Wall, now, I reckon onct, jist onct, that air all, fur I'll be gawl darned ef I ain't kinder jellus o' a good-lookin' feller like you er cuttin' eround my gal."

He introduced Jesse to the charming Miss Susan Dugger. Susan was beyond doubt the belle of the neighborhood.

She was a blue-eyed flaxen-haired blonde, plump as a partridge, and with lips as red as ripe cherries. Jesse did not wonder that Coon was rather jealous of her. She was like all the others, illiterate, rude, and ignorant. She had been all her life in this neighborhood, where school three months in the winter was all they could afford, and where rudeness and ignorance was rather looked upon as an accomplishment.

"Wall, yes, I dance wth yer, stranger," said Susan, on being introduced to him.

"Well, I'm mighty glad on't," Jesse said.

"Now, Zeph, only onct—jist onct—fur she's my gal, mind yer."

"Oh, git er long, Coon, cos yer jelus," laughed Susan.

"Only onct," cried Coon, as they whirled away to take their places in the set that was forming.

"Yer feller?" whispered Jesse.

"No—ain't got no feller."

"Do yer want one?" he whispered.

"N-no—nobody don't keer nothin' fur me, no how."

"Yer bet they do, Susan."

"No, they don't."

"Don't Coon?"

"Oh, yes, Coon sez he does, but I berlieve he's got ernother gal over on the Fabby."\*

"Do you suppose he has?"

"Believe it."

"Why don't you get another fellow?"

"Oh, I can't," and she blushed and gave her pretty self a survey.

"Yes, yer kln."

"Who?"

"Me!"

"You!"

"Yes."

"Oh, pshhaw! how yer do talk."

"Well, I mean it."

"All ter yer places!" cried the floor manager.

Then there was a giggling and a hustling of everybody to get to their places.

Jesse James had been to many a country dance, and knew just how they went.

"Music!"

The fiddlers struck up, each on a different key, of a famous tune called "Old Zip Coon."

"Honor ter yer pardners."

Everybody bowed, and then came the call:

"All jine hands an' circle to the left."

Away they all went whirling; Jesse James was perhaps a little more graceful and a little more accomplished than the others.

This showed out even above his snperb acting, and he played his part exceedingly well, too. When the set was over he whispered to his pretty companion:

"Say, Susan?"

"What?"

"Won't you lemme dance another set with yer ter-night?"

"Oh, Coon 'll be mad."

"He's yer feller then?"

"No, he ain't."

"Then let me be."

"Yon?"

"Yes."

"Sho, yer jokin'."

"No, I ain't."

"Shure yer ain't."

"I'm in dead earnest."

"Air yer?"

"Bet I am."

"Why, Coon would lick yer."

"He can't."

"He's er lighter."

"So am I. Be my gal, dance with me another set, an' I'll show him."

"Wall, I'll dance with yer."

"Good ernuff. Now let's go off hyar and set down an' hev a rale good talk. I wanta tell yer suthln'."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Why, I like yer."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Sho."

"I's so."

They were now seated, their backs to the wall.

Then Coon came along, his face wearing an uneasy look.

"Wall, that's over, ain't it?" he asked.

"That set is," said Susan.

"But we are goin' ter dance another."

"No, I be hanged ef ye air, not with my gal."

"She ain't yer gal no more'a she's mine," cried Jesse James, pretending to be very indignant.

"She ain't. Now, look hyar, ye thunderin' black head, do yer want ter hev botiz yer blarsted eyes knocked inter one?"

"Yer can't do it."

"Wall, ye go ter monkeying round that 'air gal very much an' I'll show yer."

Jesse saw that his rival was growing quite angry, and though he had had no intention of a row when he came to the country ball, he thought if it must come he would not prevent it.

The object of the quarrel sat supremely happy to be thus honored, and smiled her most bewitching smiles. Little did she dream how serious the trouble would grow.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### JESSE AND THE GRANGERS.

"Now lookee hyar, stranger, I'm er goin ter talk mighty plain ter you. I don't want any more o' that monkey business eround hyar ter-night, or ye'll git chawed up, d'yer hyar," cried the enraged Coon.

"Coon Diggs, yer great big overgrown pictur out o' a comic almanac, d'yer want ter git the stuffin knocked out o' you."

"Now don't you fellers make any fuss hyar," said Susan, in a cold, heartless manner.

"I'm not er goin' ter be run over," growled Coon.

"Nur me nuther."

"Wot's all ther row," roared the floor manager.

"I'm goin' ter lick that calf," roared Coon.

"I'm er goin' ter skin that air coon," cried Jesse.

"Ye'll find it er tough job."

"No, I won't. His hide 'll be so rotten fur the next man, that he'll hev an easy job agin I git through with him."

"Now, hush up!"

"I won't," cried Coon.

"Yer will!"

"Put him out; he's er raisin' the fuss."

"No, I ain't."

"He wuz."

"Wuz I, Suze?" asked Jesse James, appealing to the girl.

"I dun know."

"Wall, I warn't."

"He wuz."

"Ef yer don't quit yer monkey business an' git quiet, I'm goin' ter put both av yer out o' doors," cried the floor manager.

"It all come up erbout me a-going ter dance with Suze, hyar," said Jesse James.

"Wall I reckon ez how Suze iz my gal, an' by ginger I ain't er goin' ter have anybody er dancin' with her 'at I don't want."

Jesse James felt particularly reckless, and having taken a dislike to Coon Diggs from the very first, he determined to take advantage of the occasion to get his spite out of him. Jesse held human life very lightly, and thought no more of killing Coon Diggs than an animal.

"She's not yer gal," he cried.

"Who's is she?"

"Mine."

"She ain't."

"She is, I tell yer."

"Yer a liar!" roared Coon.

Whack! came Jesse's fist against his face.

The fellow staggered, and the floor manager yelled:

"Hold on! Hold on! Yer don't fight in hyar. Go out o' doors an' fight it out."

By this time everybody's attention was directed toward them, and half a dozen young men ran in between them.

"No, yer don't!—by jinks, yer don't fight in hyar!" roared the officious floor manager.

"An' it's got ter be fa'r!" yelled another granger.

"Who is that ar' feller, anyway, wat's comin' hyar an' raisin' sich a rumpus wi' all on us?" cried another.

"Nobody knows."

"Ain't I Zeph?" cried Jesse. "Ef I ain't, who am I, I'd like ter know?"

"Who's Zeph?"

"A feller I'm er-goin' ter lick!" roared the exasperated Coon. "Oh, lemme git at him."

Country dances in Missouri not infrequently end in a fight. Participants usually fill up with forty rod whisky and get in a fair humor for destroying something, and then pitch into one another.

The women, including the fair Susan Dugger, got out of the room into another apartment.

Jesse James now realized that he was in a scrape but he was not to be intimidated.

"I'm in for it, and I will cut my way out," he thought.

It did not take him long to see that the sympathies of all were with his rival. There was no end of whispering and consulting.

"Now ef ye fight it air got ter be fa'r," said one.

"All I want is fair play," answered Jesse.

"It air all any un wants," said the coon.

"Let's sarch 'em!" cried one.

Jesse determined not to submit to this, for beneath his short farmer coat was an arsenal of revolvers and long, sharp knives.

Coon himself, who had a slung-shot, protested. The floor-manager, who was also provided with a slung-shot, said it was no use.

Jesse James put the matter to an end by saying if they wanted to fight to come on.

He strode from the house and went out into the orchard where the weeds were very high, calling to Coon to come on if he wasn't too big a coward. Coon stung to the quick, swore he would come soon enough for his good, and hurried after him with his slung-shot ready.

Jesse, standing in the shadow of a dark tree with a knife in his hand, waited until his rival ran against him and then plunged the knife to the hilt in his breast.

"Oh, oh, oh!" yelled Coon, dropping his slung-shot.

"What's ther matter, Coon?" roared the floor-manager who was only a few paces behind.

"He's stabbed me!"

Coon fell, and Jesse had only time to throw some weeds and vines over the dying man, light his dark-lantern and draw his revolver when the floor-manager was on him.

"Murderer, whar air ye?" roared the granger.

"Here I am!" cried Jesse, flashing the light on the granger. "Take that!" and he sent a bullet crashing through his heart.

With a cry the granger fell dead.

"What's that?"

"Who's shot?"

"Who fired?"

And a score of other like expressions fell on the air.

Having performed his deadly work, Jesse James closed the slide of his dark lantern, returned it to his inside pocket, and glided away behind a tree.

"I didn't come here to have any trouble with them," he muttered to himself, "but they would have it."

As he stood waiting to learn what would be done, he heard hurried footsteps and eager, anxious voices:

"Tom! Tom! Tom, are you hurt?"

"Where is Tom?"

"Coon!"

Still no answer.

"Go'n bring a light, somebody, an' be dog goned quick erbout it, for I be hanged ef I don't believe that ar' feller's killed both on 'em."

"Yes, he hez. They won't speak."

"Bring er light 'ere, quick, fur goodness sake."

"All right."

A few moments later Jesse saw some one approaching with a light. He didn't care to be seen, so he withdrew quietly, and by a circuitous route reached Siroc.

That noble steed had heard the pistol-shot and scented the smell of powder, and all his war-like soul was roused.

He stamped the ground impatiently and snuffed the air. But at the magic touch of his mas-

\* The "Fabby or Fablas" is a small river in Missouri.



ter's hand he became quiet and docile. Jesse sprang into the saddle just as the shrieks of women and loud threats of men announced the discovery of the body in the garden.

"Time has come to go," said Jesse, and, wheeling Siroc about, he galloped down the road.

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### TEN TO TWO.

It was long past midnight when Jesse James reached the home of his friend where Frank was asleep. He felt heartily ashamed of himself for the uncalled for and unprovoked row in which he had slain two persons, but he thought there would be no more of it. The idea that Zeph, at the granger ball, would be traced to him at the home of his friend, never for a single moment entered his head.

He put Siroc in the barn himself and went to bed in a room adjoining the room in which Frank slept.

Next morning the farmer, at whose house they were stopping, said:

"What kind of a time did you have at the dance, Jesse?"

"It ended in a row," Jesse answered.

"Ha, ha, ha! such things usually do."

"What was it about?" asked Frank.

"A girl."

"And bad whisky, I suspect," put in their friend.

"I guess it was," Jesse evasively answered.

No further reference was had to the matter.

That day, as Frank and Jesse lay on their couches in the attic reading the papers, Jesse said:

"Frank, I think we had better leave here."

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Oh, we have been here long enough."

"We've got plenty of money, and I don't care to rush out on the road soon again."

"What's the use of waiting?"

"What's the use of hurrying."

"Well, we can go somewhere else."

"I don't think we'll be safer anywhere than here. We have just been run away from mother's house."

Jesse said no more, but he feared that their friend's house was not so safe as his brother seemed to think it was.

The day passed, and that evening the farmer came in and called Jesse down to the sitting-room. When Jesse entered he saw that his friend's face was very grave. He sent out the children who were playing in the house and told Jesse to sit down.

"That row last night was quite serious, Jesse," he said earnestly.

"How do you know?"

"I've heard all about it."

"Who told you?"

"Sam Britt was there, and he said two men were killed."

"Well?"

"That's not the worst."

"Give us the worst—the very worst," Jesse coolly returned.

"They were killed by a man who is a stranger in this neighborhood."

"That's all right."

"But wait, Jesse, do you know who that stranger was?"

"I frankly admit it was me."

"Why did you do it?"

"I was pushed into it. Both of them died with weapons in their hands. It was my life or theirs."

"I care nothing about the men who were killed. They were both of them worthless fellows and the country is much better off without them. There is a suspicion."

"Of what?"

Jesse was now deeply interested.

"That the murderer is near—is still in the neighborhood."

Jesse was thoughtful for several moments and then asked:

"Have you told Frank?"

"No."

"That's all right, Frank would scold for nothing; we'll go to-night."

"At what time?"

"Midnight."

"I am afraid that will be too late."

"Why, you don't contemplate an attack before morning?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, we'll go sooner if necessary."

"I don't know that it's necessary. I can risk it if you can."

Jesse James said no more.

He and Frank both remained in the house all day, and at night ate supper as usual and retired to their room.

"Frank, we must go to-night."

"To-night!" cried Frank, who had no love of the road.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"There are reasons."

"Do you think we are watched?"

"Yes."

For a few moments Frank James was silent, and then, fixing his eyes on his brother, he asked:

"Jesse, I want to ask you something."

"What?"

"Didn't you raise thunder at the dance last night?"

"Well, we had trouble."

"And that's the cause?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you——"

"Hold on, Frank, it's no use to say why didn't you. We're in a fix and now the sooner we get out of it the better."

Then came a rap at the door.

"Come in," said Jesse.

It was their friend.

"Jesse, you have been tracked to the house, and they have come after you."

"Do they dream the James Boys are here?" he asked.

"No, they are after the man called Zeph who killed the two men last night, and they say that his horse has been tracked here."

Jesse reflected a moment and asked:

"How many are they?"

"Ten."

"Ten to two?"

"Yes."

"Are they well armed?"

"Yes, all are armed."

"Well, Frank, we have fought such odds more than once."

"If it hadn't a-been for your fool caper last night——"

"Hush! No more about that now!" cried Jesse. "You make me tired talking of such things."

"Well, this everlasting running and night riding makes me tired. I want some rest."

"You've had a week."

"A week in months."

"Well, boys, you've got no time to spend quarreling," said the farmer. "Those fellows have found the same horse in my barn that was at the dance, and they are coming in after the fellow who did the killing."

"Well, we'll go."

There was hasty buckling of revolvers about their waists, and every arrangement made.

The James Boys stole down the back stairway into the kitchen.

"Frank, there are ten to two."

"Yes."

"Come here, Alf," Jesse whispered to a boy.

"What d'yer want?" the boy asked. He was frightened, white as a sheet, and had his hands in his pockets.

"Are there any men on the rear porch?"

"Yez, zur."

"How many?"

"Two."

"Two; well, Frank, now grip your pistol, we'll knock 'em down, and then to the barn."

"I wonder if there are any at the barn?"

Jesse asked the boy and he said he believed there was one.

They thought they could easily dispose of him, and Jesse and Frank went to the kitchen door. There was no light in the kitchen and they walked on tip toe.

At the front door the voices of men could be heard talking with the farmer and demanding admittance.

"I rather guess we are in for it, in a high old time," Jesse thought.

He carefully opened the door.

As he did so he heard a step, and a voice said:

"No one can come out here."

"Whack!"

A low groan.

There was a rush, a short scuffle, and Frank grappled another by the throat completely shutting off his wind.

"Frank, Frank," Jesse whispered, "let me hit him on the head!"

"No, leave him to me. He's going down," Frank answered.

The fellow sank to the porch floor, and Frank gave him a tap on the head to insure silence.

"Now we've only one more," Jesse whispered.

"At the barn?"

"Yes, at the barn."

"Well, we'll soon make decidedly short work of him."

They paused a moment and listened to the loud voices in the front, and the threats to tear down the house if they were not admitted to search the premises.

"I'm the constable o' the township," said one voice, "and I've got er warrant for the arrest o' this feller Zeph, what did the murder. I'm goin' to have him if he's in your house if I have to break in every door and window in the place."

"Wall, I reckon ef that's so I'll hev ter let yer in," said the farmer.

"Come on, Jesse," said Frank.

Jesse and Frank then stole away to the barn.

"Is that you, Roxy," asked a voice, evidently the guard.

"Yes," Jesse whispered.

"Got 'em."

"Yes."

He seized the man by the throat and Frank clapped a hand over his mouth.

In a moment the fellow sank limp and insensible to the ground. The James Boys tied him hard and fast and then they went to the barn and saddled their horses. Jesse thought there was no need to hurry. It would be several minutes before the men they had knocked down would be able to give the alarm.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### A WONDERFUL ESCAPE.

JESSE and Frank made their escape from the barn and the neighborhood, and went at once to Kansas City.

Here in the new and thriving city, which was a marvel of phenomenal growth, and where were so many people constantly coming and going, they would be least noticed.

They were disguised, of course, as they entered the city. They sent their horses to McCall's livery farm and went to the house of their friend named Edwards.

Edwards was a wealthy newspaper man, and one who was calculated a warm friend and admirer of the James Boys. He never refused them shelter under any circumstances. It made no difference to him if they did come to him with their hands reeking with the blood of their victims, they always found in him a friend ready to harbor them, defend them and lie for them.

Edwards lived in style in Kansas City and was well esteemed.

"Well, boys, I am glad you've come," he said. "I thought it was about time that some one of the old band should show up."

"We are glad to come, John, and hope we can stay here awhile in peace," said Jesse.

Three days passed in quiet seclusion to Jesse and Frank, and they began to hope that they were going to have a long period of rest. Jesse, as usual, became restless. He was of a temperament that could not stand confinement. Frank was more quiet and could remain in a house for weeks.

"I must go out on the street," he one day said to Frank.

"Why?"

"I want air."

"Yes, and you'll bring us into trouble again."

"No I won't."

"Yes you will."

"I am going to have a look about town."

"Fool, you'd run right into the arms of the police."

But Jesse had made up his mind to take a stroll on the street, and nothing could change his purpose.

He went to his room, and disguising himself as an old man went down to the street, took a car and went up town to the fair ground and down Forrest avenue.

After a long ramble he returned.

As he went quickly in the house he heard the clatter of horses feet on the street, and a man passing hailed a horseman.

"Hello, Timberlake," he cried, "where are you going?"

"Hush, don't speak my name!" said the horseman.

Jesse entered the house and closing the door stood in the hall and gazed out of a side window.

He now recognized the horseman as Sheriff Timberlake.

Timberlake was in disguise, but Jesse knew him.

He bent over in the saddle and talked to the man in an undertone, motioning his head occasionally at the house of Edwards.

Jesse went up-stairs to his brother's room.

Frank was in, reading Shakespeare, which was his favorite pastime.

"Frank?" said Jesse.

"What?"



"Thunder is to pay now."  
 "Why?"  
 "Timberlake is out on the street."  
 "You've roused him, scared him up, have you?" cried Frank. "Oh, I wish you could be still and remain at home like a decent person should."  
 "Well, Frank, it's not my fault."  
 "Whose is it?"  
 "I don't know. He is there, and he suspects we are here."  
 "That means then that we've got to go."  
 Frank and Jesse both crept to the window, and, pulling the curtains partly aside, gazed out at the big sheriff, who was mounted on a large bay horse.  
 "Do you know who he is talking with?"  
 "No; do you?"

Jesse and Frank followed their friend out of the house through the rear yard to the stables, and there they went up into the hay mows.  
 Ringing was heard at the bell, and in twenty minutes the place was surrounded by police.  
 "It's going to be a close call," said Jesse to his brother Frank.  
 "Yes."  
 Soon they could hear the police searching the house, the yard and the premises.  
 "I tell you, major, I tracked them to your house," Timberlake could be heard saying, "and I know very well that they are somewhere near here."  
 "Well, I don't."  
 "I do."  
 "Find them, Timberlake. But I warn you

the hay into the road. Both were very noiseless, and the driver never dreamed that he had had two passengers.

No one but the cunning Edwards himself ever suspected it.

The load of hay had been intended for his barn in the city, but he saw that by it he had an excellent opportunity to aid his friends to escape, and he adopted the plan as we have described.

Jesse and Frank were shrewd enough to take advantage of it, and now we find them on the road four miles in the country.

They were in a lane with a hedge fence running on either side.

"Jesse, where'll we go?" Frank asked.

"I don't know."

"Where is your hat?"



Kneeling by the side of the dead dapple gray, he leveled his rifle and fired. One of the foremost men fell.

"I don't."  
 "I wonder where John is?"  
 "In his room?"  
 "Call him up."  
 Frank ran down to their friend's room and tapped on the door.  
 "Come in," said Edwards.  
 "Will you please come up to our room a moment?" said Frank.  
 There was something in Frank's excited manner and pale face which alarmed Edwards, and he flew up to the room of the outlaws.  
 Jesse stood by the window. Pulling the curtain partially aside, he said:  
 "Look out."  
 Edwards did so.  
 "Who is that man?"  
 "On horseback?"  
 "No, on foot—standing on the ground."  
 "He is chief of police, but I don't know the man on horseback."  
 "I do."  
 "Who is he?"  
 "Timberlake."  
 "What, the sheriff?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Why, I know him, and that fellow don't look one bit like him."  
 "No wonder, because he is disguised. But, John, we are in a critical place here."  
 "Why?"  
 "He's watching us."  
 "Suspects you are here."  
 "Yes."  
 "Well, that's bad."  
 John reflected a moment and said:  
 "I'll hide you in my stables."  
 It was now growing dark.

now, that this insult and indignity will cost you your next election."  
 "Very well, I am going to do my duty nevertheless."  
 "All right. Go ahead."  
 Jesse and Frank crept up to the upper mow over the open passage below, in which wagons of hay and corn were driven to throw into the barn.  
 They saw their anxious friend and policemen with lanterns. They crawled out on a high beam, and lay there waiting for a few moments.  
 Suddenly, the great folding doors opened and a wagon load of hay was driven in.  
 "I don't want that here!" cried Edwards.  
 "Where?" asked the driver.  
 "Take it to my farm, four miles in the country. I have all the hay here I want."  
 In an instant Jesse James conceived a most wonderful escape.  
 Touching Frank, he whispered:  
 "Frank."  
 "What?"  
 "Follow me."  
 "Where?"  
 Jesse for answer leaped down on the load of hay.  
 Frank dropped down at his side, and the wagon rolled out into the barn-yard among the police, turned around, and was driven out with the James Boys snugly concealed in it.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

##### THE BOY OF BIG BLUE.

Four miles beyond the city limits, just before the wagon turned into the barn of the friend of the James Boys, Jesse and Frank dropped from

"I left it at the barn on the hay."  
 "That's bad."  
 "Bad—it is infernal bad."  
 "What are you going to do?"  
 "Oh, I can go bareheaded, for that matter, but my hat at the barn, or on the wagon, will be a clew to the police."  
 Frank James grew furious, and began to curse Jesse for his stupidity.  
 "Now—now, Frank, just hold up. Let's have no more of your nonsense. I couldn't help my hat being lost."  
 "You could have hung on to it."  
 "Yes, we could have hung on to our horses, but we didn't. Here we are on foot, and they in the city."  
 "What will become of them?"  
 "John will get them to-morrow, and send them to mother's," said Jesse James.  
 "Well, I hope so."  
 "Hello! what's that?"  
 "What?"  
 "Don't you hear nothing?"  
 "No."  
 "Horses."  
 "By ginger! we must get out of here in a hurry."  
 "Where'll go?"  
 "Through the hedge."  
 "Through the hedge—and great Scott! there isn't a hole here big enough for a rabbit to crawl through."  
 "No."  
 "Then what are we to do?"  
 They ran up the hedge row and down the hedge row, and all the while the clatter of hoofs was coming nearer.  
 At one time Jesse was half in the notion of



jumping the hedge, but it was too high for that. Then what were they to do?

At last they found a broken place in the hedge.

"Frank?"

"What, Jess?"

"We must creep through here."

"Creep through? We'll be scratched to death?"

"Don't you hear Timberlake coming?"

"Yes."

"Better be skinned than hanged."

"You're right. Who'll go first?"

"I will."

"Go on."

Jesse then pulled his coat up over his head and dived head-first into the hedge. Frank pushed his feet on through, and the bandit king was safely on the other side.

"Come on, Frank."

"Are you through?"

"Yes."

"Much scratched?"

"A little, but it's better than being hanged come on."

Frank backed off like a ram going into a fight, and running forward with all his might, plunged head first into the hedge.

Jesse seized him by the shoulder and pulled him through.

"Are they coming?" asked Frank.

"They are close."

"What'll we do?"

"Lie down until they pass."

They had to wait but a few minutes for the mounted men galloped by. They thundered on to the barn upon the hill, and Jesse heard them talking to the man who was unharnessing the horses.

Jesse's hat had been found, and they were suspicious that the bandits had come away on the bay.

The James Boys left their hiding place and crawled across the meadow. They came to a field of corn, and there halted for consultation.

"We've got to have horses, Frank."

"Yes, but how are we to get them?"

"Steal them."

"Horse thieves, are we?" said Frank, in contempt.

"You must either escape as a horse thief or be hung for a bank robber."

After a few moments sober reflection Frank said he believed he would prefer to escape as a horse thief.

"I thought so."

"Where'll we get them?"

"At the first barn we come to."

Frank and Jesse still had their revolvers. In an inside pocket each had a complete disguise, wigs and make ups, and it was decided by them to disguise themselves.

"I've got a nigger wig," said Jesse, "and I believe I will be a nigger."

"Have you burnt cork?"

"Oh, yes in abundance."

"Then go ahead."

They rode down in the cornfield and by the aid of pocket mirrors, and Jesse's lantern which he always carried they were not long in effecting complete disguises.

Then they rose and Jesse looking like a negro, said:

"Now where can we find horses?"

"As Hamlet says, aye there's the rub," Frank answered.

"If you would quit reading Shakespeare and devote more attention to your profession I think you would get along better," said Jesse.

"I am not the one that brings us all our trouble."

"Who then?"

"You."

"It's false."

"Take care."

"Well, we won't quarrel, come on."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to find horses."

They crossed three fields and came to a wood. Jesse knew they were not safe, for he could hear the sound of horsemen on the road.

They ran across a woods pasture and came to a house. Near it was a large barn, and the James Boys hoped to find some horses.

Jesse went first, Frank following close in his wake, and there was but a short time elapsed before they were at the barn.

It was locked with a padlock. Jesse's lantern soon showed them a stout stake and he pulled the staple and entered.

Two saddles hung on the wall at the side of the door with bridles near them.

Jesse and Frank James seized on the saddles and bridles.

Then they went back into the rear of the barn where were some horses. Jesse selected a large, fine dapple-gray, and Frank a chestnut sorrel mare.

Both were saddled in a trice.

As they led them forth from the barn, they heard voices in the lane.

"Let's stop at this house and inquire," said one voice. "They may have stopped here."

"Oh, no, they didn't."

"I tell you they are in the neighborhood, and I know it. The James Boys are queer fellows, and we may run on them when least expected."

"Well, you can stop, Dick, if you want to, for my part I'm goin' on."

"Go to thunder, then."

"No, I'm goin' to find the James Boys."

"Frank," whispered Jesse.

"What?"

"Lead the horses around the barn and there wait for me."

"All right."

He left Frank with the horses, crossed the fence, and crept up to the gate where the horse of the officer was tied.

The starlight shone on something bright at the gate, and Jesse crept up to it. It was a rifle.

"A Winchester—ha, ha! that's good."

He could hear the officer rapping on the door as if he would wake the dead, and crept back to the horse.

He untied his horse, and started leading him down the road.

"Hello, my horse is loose," said the officer. "Confound the luck! it's too bad."

He ran out for the horse, and found his rifle gone.

Jesse waited for him to come up to the steed, and leaping suddenly struck him a blow on the head, which felled him senseless in the road.

Then he turned the horse loose, striking him with the gun to make him run away. He stooped over the insensible man, took some cartridges from his pocket and ran to Frank.

"Frank, Frank," he cried, "give me my horse."

Wild shouts were heard.

"Here they come," said Frank.

"We must separate," said Jesse. "I'm going to the Big Blue. If you hear of a colored boy of the Big Blue you may know it is I."

"Good-bye, Jess."

"Good-bye, Frank."

They separated, and the chase continued all the night.

Next day a colored fellow might have been seen riding a dapple gray horse along the banks of the Big Blue.

The negro was bareheaded, and when accosted by the only man who met him, he said:

"I'se de boy o' de Big Blue, boss."

## CHAPTER XX.

### DEATH OF THE DAPPLE GRAY.

It was nearly noon and the sun was broiling hot.

A darky, mounted on a jaded dapple gray, was riding along a dusty road which wound about the river.

An old farmer, with an old-fashioned long-barreled rifle on his shoulder and a pair of squirrels in his hand, was coming along the road.

"Hello, feller," said the old man.

"Howdy, boss?" the negro answered.

"Who are you?"

"Me? Oh, I iz the boy o' de big Big Blue."

"You are?"

"Sartin suah, boss."

The old man stopped in the middle of the road, put his rifle on the ground and leaned upon it.

The negro checked his dapple gray and gazed at him in open-mouthed wonder.

"Ain't yer hot?" asked the old man.

"I air erbout ter roast, boss."

"Why don't ye git in the shade?"

"'Cos I'd rather be in de sun."

"Ain't ye afeerd a-heim sun struck?"

"Dun know. Seems ter me de sun strikes purty hard."

"Wall, ye ain't comfortable."

"'Body couldn't be comfortable wld de sun fryin' out der fat, could 'e?"

"Can't yer go ter de shade?"

"Spect I mought, boss."

"Wall, all I've got ter say iz thet yer a fool thet yer don't do it!"

"Spect; I iz boss, we don't quarrel dar."

"Where are yer gwine?"

"Home."

"Whar d'yer live?"

"Up the big Blue."

"How fur up?"

"Er way up."

"What air yer doin' wth that air gun?"

"Been huntin'."

"Whar's yer hat?"

"Lost it, boss."

"Did yer find anything?"

"No."

The old man scrutinized the pretended darky with his glasses, and said:

"Yer a quar un."

"Reckin I iz, boss."

"How many miles up ther river d'yer live?"

"Dun know."

"No."

"Can't yer guess?"

"Ten or a hundred."

"Yer a fool."

"Reckin yer right, boss. Good-day."

The darky cantered along the road which wound about with the river.

The old man watched him for some moments, and, muttering something under his breath, he wheeled about and disappeared in the woods.

"Now, I don't like that quizzical old fellow one bit," said Jesse James, for, of course, the reader has borne in mind that pretended darky was none other than the great bandit king of America.

Jesse had been riding hard all day with Timberlake and his sleuth-hounds constantly on his trail.

He thought it almost impossible to shake them off, and was growing a little deperate.

"If that old fellow hasn't got his suspicions roused, they will when Timberlake and his men come on him and inquire for a hatless man on a dapple gray."

Though they did not know that Jesse was disguised as a negro, the officers would of course know that he was riding the dapple gray and without a hat.

What was Jesse's amazement to again come on the old man on the road whom he had met before.

"I say, boss, ain't dar sumpin' wrong?" Jesse asked.

"Why?"

"Pears ter me dar is."

"Wall, nigger, pears ter me thar is suthin' a leetle mite wrong."

"I passed yer two mile back."

"Yes."

"An' hyar ye iz ergin."

"Bet yer life!"

"Kin yer fly, boss?"

"Mighty nigh it."

"What yer comin' around a-huntin' me up for?" asked Jesse.

"Wall, yer seem a leetle suspicious, nigger, I wanter say that for ye."

"I am?"

"Wall, I'd smile."

"How?"

"Whar'd yer git that boss?"

"Berlongs ter my boss."

"Bet yer stole him."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. Hands up, Jesse James, or you are a dead man!"

"Timberlake, as I live!" cried Jesse James, amazed.

"Right you are, and I'll have no monkeying. Surrender."

His rifle was cocked and aimed at Jesse James' breast, and for a moment that desperado was at a loss what to do. But only for a moment.

His conclusion was instantly formed, and he acted upon it.

Throwing himself forward, he struck a quick blow with his gun.

Crack! went Timberlake's rifle, but Jesse's gun struck him on the side of his head and staggered him so the bullet aimed for him only cut the corner of his coat collar.

The dapple gray at the same moment leaped forward, striking Timberlake and knocking him down.

As he fell Jesse struck the horse across the flanks with his rifle, and away went the animal along the road like the wind.

"I'll turn about and shoot him as he rises," cried Jesse.

He checked the dapple gray and wheeled him about, but at this moment three mounted men armed with guns, came speeding forward like the wind.

"It's no time for that," said Jesse, "and he again wheeled his steed and went flying along the road."

"Stop! Let me have a horse! I will kill him!" roared Timberlake. "It's Jesse James! Let me have a horse!"

One of the men dismounted and gave up his



horse, and Timberlake mounting, went thundering up the road after the other two.

"Shoot down the horse! Kill the horse!" roared Timberlake.

Jesse James heard the command, and began to tremble for his horse more than himself.

Bang!

Bang!

A pair of rifles belched forth their deadly contents, and the dapple gray leaped spasmodically forward, turned half way about, and began to sink.

Jesse knew all was over, and shook his feet from the stirrups and leaped to the ground.

With a piteous moan the horse fell dead.

"I'll avenge you," cried Jesse.

Kneeling by the dead dapple gray, he leveled his rifle and fired. One of the two foremost men fell.

Quick as a flash he put another cartridge in the chamber, and shot the second man off his horse.

Jesse rose to his feet and cried:

"Come on Timberlake, and you shall fare the same."

But Timberlake had seen enough of Jesse's skill with a repeating rifle and did not care to go any nearer. He reined in his horse.

Timberlake had left his rifle back with the man whose horse he had borrowed, and knew full well that he was at a disadvantage.

He turned about and beat a retreat.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### DOWN THE PRECIPICE.

JESSE JAMES thought he had played the negro long enough. He removed the wig, borrowed a hat of one of the pursuers he had shot and went to a stream near by and washed himself white.

The remainder of the day he spent in the woods.

He tried to capture one of the horses of the two men who lay on the hill-side, but was unable to do so.

They sniffed the air uneasily as he approached them, and then trotted away.

He dared not follow them, for he knew full well that Timberlake was lurking somewhere not far off in the woods. He went down a path through the woods for about two miles and sat down by a tree to rest and deliberate on what to do.

Soon the sound of voices reached his ear.

They came from a thicket of wild plum trees but a short distance up the hill. Jesse started from his position on the ground and said:

"What—can it be Timberlake has me surrounded!"

With cocked rifle he crept forward through the bushes; but now as the voices again came to his ears he hears a peal of silvery laughter mingled with the merry prattle of children.

"Only some little boys and girls out plumping," thought Jesse. "Now maybe I can get some valuable information from them."

He went through the woods until he stood face to face with the children, two little girls and one boy about fourteen, who was evidently their big brother sent to guard them and watch over them.

"Hello, youngsters," he cried.

"Hello," said one of the little girls.

"Are you a huntin', mister?" asked the boy.

"Yes; I've lost my way. Which way is it to town?"

"Over that way," pointing to the north.

"How far is it?"

"About ten miles."

"So far?"

"I guess it is, mister."

The youngest girl, a saucy little black-eyed creature, came up to Jesse, and seizing his hand, said:

"Oh, mister, there's somethin' funny on your face."

"What?" he asked.

"A great black streak."

"Thunder! I didn't get all that burnt cork off after all," Jesse thought. "Now it will betray me sure."

He determined to finish washing his face when he came to some water in the woods, but these children would betray him. He determined to kill them. Jesse and Frank James had both killed children before this day, for they never hesitated to kill when it was for their safety.

But just at this moment as Jesse was about to slay the youngest first she still clinging to his hand looked up in his face and with her sweetest, most innocent smile said:

"Do you like little girls?"

A wild savage could not have harmed her after that, and Jesse James was not much worse than a savage.

"I won't do it, no, not if I hang for it."

"Won't do what?" she asked.

"Never mind, little angel, I love you," and he was gone.

The children talked a long time about how funny that strange man acted, and wondered where he was gone.

In the meanwhile Jesse James was wandering through the woods in a most wretched state of mind.

He came to a brook and washed his face perfectly clean. Then he went to a house and got some bread and cold meats. Next he wandered along the banks of a creek, wondering where he would spend the night.

"Frank and I made a mistake!" he said after a long silence. "We should have kept together instead of separating as we did."

Then he heard a distant hum of voices.

Jesse was very lonely and was driven almost to desperation by the thought that he was being gradually brought to bay.

"I believe if I could kill Timberlake, I would be willing to die," he said to himself.

It was a very dark night. The sky was overcast with clouds and the forest was dense and dark.

Below Jesse he heard the majestic sweep of the Big Blue River and all about him was the sound of night birds and chirp of crickets. Mingling with those sounds he heard the murmur of human voices.

"I know they are voices," he said to himself.

"There is no mistake about it, and who could be here but my enemies."

He drew back behind a dark oak tree that stood like a gloomy sentinel a few feet from the river bank, and crouched down to the root of it to wait.

"Yes, come on," said one voice.

"That's Timberlake," Jesse said. His heart gave a great bound at the recognition of his voice.

He and another were doing the talking, and these were the words Jesse caught:

"He may be on the other side," said Timberlake's companion.

"No, he isn't."

"Are you positive?"

"Yes."

"What do you base the knowledge on?"

"I know it."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Some children saw him."

"Curse the children. I wish I had killed 'em," said Jesse.

But he ground his teeth and kept silence.

"How did they know him?"

"Know him? They didn't."

"Then how could they tell you?"

"Why bless the innocent little girl, she was just telling about a man who had a black streak on his face and a gun in his hand."

"Of course, and you knew it was Jesse?"

"He is no longer disguised as a negro."

"Are you quite sure he is not?"

"Of course I am. I found his negro wig in the woods."

"Well, I am glad we've got him."

"Let's sit down here a moment," said Timberlake, "and wait and listen."

"I am willing."

"I am tired, are you?"

"I am."

"I wish I could meet Jesse face to face."

"You will, and that very soon," said Jesse, grinding his teeth in hate.

Jesse James regarded Timberlake as his most implacable enemy. He had been on his trail so long, and was so persistent, that to Jesse it seemed as if this chase must end in the death of one or the other.

Jesse was tempted several times to creep up on the two men, take a pistol in each hand, shoot them both and throw their bodies over the bluff.

But his caution came to his rescue. He heard signals in the woods which led him to believe that there were others near and that it would be dangerous for him to attempt such a thing.

Then the wily outlaw lay down upon the damp earth to listen to what the two men said.

"Timberlake, you seem to have a personal hatred against Jesse James," said the sheriff detective's companion.

"So I have."

Jesse strained his ears now, and his eyes sparkled and scintillated with fire which the bandit would certainly have seen had he cast a glance behind him.

"Why have you a hatred for him?"

"Oh, it's personal."

"Then you knew him?"

"Yes."

"Were you in the Confederate army together?"

"No, and yes, too. You see we both served in the southern army, but I was with Price and he with Quantrell."

"You knew him before the war?"

"Yes."

"Were boys together?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a fellow was Jesse?"

"Always a scamp, both of them."

"You and he certainly had some personal trouble."

"Well, we did."

"Was it a woman?"

"It was—or rather a girl."

Jesse listened with teeth hard set. A secret which he had ever kept sacred within his own breast was about to be revealed to others. But he restrained his natural inclination to kill Timberlake before he should tell the dark, black story of his most heinous crime.

"Well, Timberlake, if it's not too tender a subject you might tell me about it," said the sheriff's companion.

For a few moments there was a dead silence, as if the sheriff was trying to get control of his emotions before proceeding with the sad recital.

At last he began, and Jesse James almost held his breath during the recital.

"It was in the dark days of '64, when Price made his last raid into Missouri, when I was one day sent out on a foraging expedition. I was at the head of ten gallant young fellows, and had gone about ten miles into the country when we came to a farm-house.

"The owner was a Southern man, and some members of a militia company were there pillaging the house. We fired on them and drove them away."

"Then I received the thanks of a young girl named Helen, and the original Helen of Troy was not more lovely. She was only sixteen. Well, I paid many visits to the farmer, and was always welcomed by Helen. I loved her. One day as I was going there alone, I met Jesse James, who was a guerrilla with Quantrell. He had been there, but I never suspected him of being a rival."

"I was young then, but I knew full well that we could not long withstand the assaults being made on us by the Union troops. I foresaw also that the Confederacy was doomed, and I went to Helen, told her I loved her and asked her to marry me. Then she told me that Jesse James had threatened to kill me unless she married him."

"I laughed at the threat."

"Days went by, and the situation became more critical. We were going to retreat next day. I stole away in the night to the house of Helen, but as I approached it I heard shrieks, and a squad of men galloped away."

"Help me, oh, help me!" cried one voice, which I recognized as Helen's.

"I spurred my horse toward the retreating band, but Jesse James, with a mocking laugh, cried:

"She's mine! Ha, ha, ha! She is mine!"

"I'll kill you!" I roared, for I now saw that she was being abducted.

"Then three or four of them fired, and my horse fell dead under me. I was thrown head first against a tree, and lay for hours unconscious until I was picked up by some Federal soldiers. I was taken to a hospital and cared for until I recovered, hardly knowing whether I was a prisoner or a patient."

"But Helen—did you soon recover her?"

"No; her fate is unknown. Jesse James no doubt murdered her."

"Liar!" cried a voice from the darkness.

Then Jesse James, driven to a frenzy by reviving old memories and opening old sores, forgot himself, and rushed like a madman upon the sheriff.

Timberlake rose.

Jesse fired, but missed.

They grappled with each other, and a terrible struggle ensued.

Backward, step by step, they fought, and both tumbled over the precipice, still clinched in each other's arms.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AN UNKNOWN HEROINE.

PERHAPS Jesse James never comprehended what he was doing until he and the dauntless sheriff, his hated rival of years ago, plunged over the precipice.

The consciousness of falling to some unknown depth brought to him some degree of reason.



They both struck the water, and for a few moments Jesse was unconscious.

When he regained his consciousness he was clinging to a floating tree.

How he had come there he did not know. But he was there. Then he made a movement to see if his limbs were injured, and was happy to find no bones broken.

"I seem to be taking an involuntary voyage to some unknown region," he said to himself.

Only the wash of waters beneath him, and the wind stirring the branches of the floating tree reached his ear. At last he gained strength enough to climb further upon the floating tie, and held on to it with might and main to keep from rolling off.

The fall had made Jesse weak. The nervous shock, in fact, had almost prostrated him.

As he clung to the tree he asked himself.

"I wonder what has become of Timberlake? Did he drown, was he killed by the fall, or has he escaped? I thought long ago that I recognized in him my former rival, but he fled. I never murdered Helen, and for all I know, she is living yet. He accused me wrongfully there, for I never murdered her."

Then the current seemed to grow stronger, and Jesse found himself being taken more swiftly.

"Let me see," he soliloquized, trying to gather up his scattered faculties. "I am on the Big Blue; that must be the name of this stream. Yes, I am floating on the Big Blue. Is it the Big Blue or the Little Blue in which the rapids are?"

He reflected a moment and, with a startled expression in his face, said:

"It's the Big Blue!"

But why need he fear the rapids. He was certainly many hours above them, and ere his singular craft could reach them it would be light enough for him to see the shore.

But the night had suddenly grown most intensely dark, the wind was blowing the driving rain down upon his craft, and he was very wet and uncomfortable.

"One had as well stay down in the water," the outlaw growled. "I am soaked to the skin anyway."

He stretched himself out on the trunk of the tree.

The rushing, roaring, boiling and hissing of waters beneath him at last became alarming.

"I don't like this," he said.

"It can't be far to the rapids. I was nearer them than I thought."

Then on his ears there came from far, far below the awful roar. It was a long distance away, perhaps miles, but the swifter growing current told him that he would ere long be hurried over the rapids.

Many times had he stood on the banks of the stream and watched the water as it went tumbling, rushing and roaring down those rapids. Many times had he seen great monster trees hurled, plunged, crushed and rolled among the waters and rocks as if they had been straws.

He knew what little show of life there was in going over the waterfall.

Then death, with all its terrors, rose up before Jesse James. He, the wicked, bad outlaw, whose whole life had been given to sin and cruelty of every kind, was about to be hurled into eternity. Unprepared he was to face those awful realities he had long defied, and in his despair he cried out:

"Oh, help me! help me!"

The rush and roar of angry waters increase.

He clings closer to the tree, for in his weak, benumbed state, he realized that it will be almost impossible for him to reach the shore, even if he should try to swim it.

"Help! help! help!" he screamed. "Help, or I will perish!"

But back on his ears came only his own mocking echo.

He remembered then how often he had heard that cry for help, and the imploring appeal for mercy, and heeded them not. He remembered then how often he had laughed at his poor victims when crying to him for mercy, and the recollection seemed to only make his own agony the more bitter.

"Oh, spare me, spare me!"

And then the echo of his own voice sounded so like the voices of many he had heard at Lawrence and Centralia, that he closed his mouth and swore he would utter no other cry.

On down toward the roaring, rushing torrent he goes in silence and despair.

Now the first cataract is so near he can feel the thunders of his roar shaking the air, and dark as is the night, he can catch sight of the dashing foam in the distance.

All is over.

He glances on the shore and sees the cottage of a lonely fisherman on the bank. He could not see the cottage at all if there was not a lamp burning in the house and the door was open.

Oh, how he wished himself on the shore, in that peaceful, quiet cottage, but to resist was useless.

He was doomed.

On down, down he swept toward the awful whirlpool, when suddenly the root of the tree struck a stone in the center of the river, swung around, and was caught by the recurring current of the eddy, and drifted in close to shore.

Jesse realized that he was safe but for a few moments. The inevitable catastrophe had only been temporarily delayed. The eddy bore him up stream under the cottage to be caught he knew by the current, and sent again down to the awful cataract.

"I will swim ashore here," he cried.

But suddenly the awful truth dawned upon him. He had been seized with a cramp, and could no more let go the branches to which he was holding than he could fly.

This fact no doubt saved his life, for he was so weak that had he not been tangled he would have sunk.

But he had the use of his voice.

"Help, help, help!" he cried.

Voices were heard on shore coming from the house.

"Help, help!" he again called.

"Hello there!"

It was a woman's voice, but it gave hope to a despairing man.

"Help, help!"

"Are you in the water?"

"Yes."

It was so dark she could not see.

"I can't see you, where are you?"

"Here?"

"On the floating tree?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" called another woman from the cottage.

"A man."

"In the river?"

"Yes."

"Oh, mercy, he'll go over the cataract."

"He is in the eddy," answered the brave woman who was down close to the water.

"Come, help me, or I'll drown," cried the despairing man.

"Helen, can you see him?" asked the voice from the house.

"No, light a torch and bring it here."

"Be quick," cried Jesse.

"Can't you swim?" asked the woman by the water.

"No, I have a cramp."

"Are you in the water?"

"Partly."

"Climb out on the tree."

"I can't."

"Have you lost your strength?"

"Almost."

"Hurry with the torch, Jane!"

"I am coming."

"Be quick. If that current catches him he will go over next time."

"Yes."

"Oh, do hurry!" roared Jesse, frantic with dread.

Never had he been so near death before."

He seemed to feel the monster's icy fingers clutching him.

He clung tenaciously to the branches of the tree; in fact, he could not let go of them, for his fingers were frozen, as it were, to them.

"Hurry, Jane, hurry!"

"Coming."

"Bring a rope."

"Where will I get one?"

"There is a clothes line on a peg under the porch."

"I don't much like to leave the children and Bessie so sick."

"Never mind the children, help me," roared Jesse.

At any other time the disgusting selfishness of the bandit might have turned the women against him, and caused them to have abandoned him to his fate.

But Jesse was pitied. They knew not who he was nor did they care.

He was a fellow being in distress, which was all they knew or wanted to know.

Jane at last brought the cord and torch.

"Throw it to him, Helen," she said.

She made an effort.

"I can't reach him. I can't throw it so far."

"Then how are we to get it to him."

"Is there no boat?"

"No. It washed away this afternoon."

"Then, Helen, he must swim."

"I can't, I can't."

"Hold," said Helen.

"What?"

"I can swim."

"But the danger?"

"We must not think of that."

She removed her shoes and stockings and outer garments.

"Are you going out in that awful stream?"

"Yes."

"Helen, you might drown."

"I know it, but I will not stay here and see a fellow being swept into eternity."

Jane said no more.

There was a splash.

Jesse held his breath. Would this unknown heroine be able to save him?" he asked himself again and again.

Helen had taken the precaution to tie the rope about her waist, and struck out boldly for the floating tree.

On the dark face of the water they could not see her, but they heard her occasionally splashing the water and drawing nearer and nearer to the tree.

Jesse James, stunned by the shock of the fall, and being so long in the water, was benumbed and in a sort of comatose state.

He heard her nearer and nearer, and felt his senses gradually stealing away.

With it all was the awful dread of again falling, and he clutched, with an unnatural grasp, the branches of the tree.

His hands cramped and his fingers ached, but he could not let go.

He clung to the branches without knowing what he was doing.

The unknown heroine at last reached the tree.

She held to the log with one hand and with the other untied the rope from about her body, and tied the end fast to a broken branch.

Then she called to Jane:

"Pull, Jane, pull with all your might."

Jane pulled on the rope and stayed the motion of the tree, which was approaching dangerously near to the fatal current.

Helen swam back to shore, and crawling out, aided Jane, and after almost exhausting their strength, the tree was pulled into land.

Jesse felt some one touch him.

"Let go the limbs," said a voice at his side.

"I can't."

"Hand me the hatchet, Jane. I will cut off the limbs."

Jane gave her the hatchet, and the branches to which Jesse clung were cut off.

The women then dragged him to the cottage, where, strong man that he was, he swooned in the arms of the unknown heroine.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### SAVED BY A DOG.

JESSE JAMES possessed a powerful frame and a powerful constitution with it. He had gone through many ordeals and always recuperated rapidly. He recovered consciousness and gazed for a moment into the face of his rescuer, and then started back as if he had seen a ghost.

"Great—"

"Are you better?" interrupted the woman.

"Yes—let me go—I—I must go."

"But you need refreshments. Here is some hot punch I prepared for you."

"Y—yes but—I don't—"

"Yes, you must drink it, or you will not be able to go."

He seemed powerless in her presence, and submitted.

She poured out a glass full, and he drank it. As the fiery liquor began to course through his veins it seemed to thrill him with a new life.

"I must go now."

"Wait a moment. How long have you been without food?"

"Several hours," he answered.

"You must have some."

"I suppose so."

She brought him some cold meats, fish and bread which he ate, for he was very hungry. All the while he kept his eyes fastened on her, and at last he started up, saying:

"I must go."

"If you are strong enough you may, for we have no wish to detain you."

This remark cut him worse than a knife through his chest would have done. He staggered to his feet and went to the door.

"Come here," he said, pausing at the door and holding on by the facing.



She came to him, evincing neither fear nor surprise.

"I want to speak with you."

"Not here."

"Will you come out with me?"

"Yes."

"Get your bonnet, for it rains."

"I need none."

He went out and she followed him. When they were outside under a tree they paused.

"Helen, do you know me?"

"Yes."

"Are you sorry you rescued me?"

"No."

"You are a remarkable woman. Have you forgiven me?"

"Yes."

"After all the wrong I have done you?"

"I try not to think of the past."

Then came an awkward silence, broken by Jesse James saying:

"I have been a very bad, wicked man, and have done many things which I regret, but, Helen, I never did anything I regret as the wrongs I have done you."

"Go off and try to be better."

"I can't."

"You can be honest if you will."

"Where have you lived all these years?"

"Everywhere."

"Have you ever seen your parents?"

"No, they died before I returned."

"Do you know that he lives?"

"Timberlake?"

"Yes."

"Does he know that you live?"

"No."

"This world is full of mystery," said Jesse, sadly.

"There, you had better go," she said.

"Can I see you again?"

"No."

He went away in the darkness, and could not but wonder at the strange turn affairs sometimes took.

This woman, whom he had snatched away from home and friends so many years before, when she was little more than a child, whom he had deprived of parents and kindred, was destined to save his life.

How strange, how remarkably strange.

The rain ceased falling, the clouds cleared away and the sky was bright and smiling when day dawned.

Jesse needed no disguise now to look like a tramp. His clothes were only partially dried on him.

He went to a farm house about four miles from the river and called for breakfast.

"Hello, man, what's the matter with yer," asked the farmer.

"I'm wet."

"Well, I'd say ye was. How'd it come?"

"I was fishing—upset last night and came near being drowned."

"You don't say so."

"Yes, my boat capsized."

"Too bad."

"And it rained on me for three hours, at least."

"Well, no wonder yer wet."

"The only wonder is I'm not drowned," Jesse answered.

"Ye want yer breakfast?"

"Yes."

"S'pose ye've got no money?"

"Oh, yes, I have. I can pay."

"All right."

The wife and two grown daughters set to work preparing breakfast for him and others.

Jesse was soon refreshing himself. A neighbor came riding by, and the farmer hailed him and asked him to alight. As the neighbor wasn't in much of a hurry he said he would, and spinging off his horse entered the house.

"Well, Neighbor Barnes, what's the news," asked the farmer.

"I've got nothin' in particular."

"What do you think of the report about Jesse James?"

Jesse dropped his knife and fork at this and turned deathly white.

"Ain't heard it."

"They say he was drowned last night."

"Drowned?"

"That's the report."

"Where?"

"In the Big Blue."

"Who tells it?"

"Timberlake."

"The sheriff?"

"Yes, and he ort ter know, because Timberlake came mighty near goin' down to the bottom with him."

"How did it all happen?"

"Well, Timberlake and some of his men have been running the James Boys for several days, and it seems they separated. Last night, Jesse was hemmed in on Bragg's Bluff, which ye know is about thirty or forty feet high, right out over the water."

"Well, Timberlake and one o' his men were sittin' on the bluff, an' the others were slowly closin' in on Jesse, when all to once he busted right out o' the woods like a painter, ran agin Timberlake, struck him a whack, and both clinched."

"He and Timberlake were right on the edge of the bluff, and both went over kersplash in the water. Timberlake was on top that time, and he thinks Jesse went down like a log."

"He had the senses knocked out o' him by the fall hisself, but he came to in time to grab a root that stuck out o' the bank and hold on until his boys could come and pull him out."

"And warn't nothin' seen o' Jesse?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, well—it's a good riddance."

"I'm sorry of it though."

"That feller ort ter hang. I want ter see him hang, and I think drowning is too good for him."

"So do I."

"An' in my opinion it's er blamed pity that he's drowned."

"So it air."

"A man who's been guilty of all the sins which a feller can commit, an' then ter git off without being hung's too much. I'm kinder sorry he is drowned."

Jesse James, who black as he was at heart, had some sort of feeling, and he felt his blood boiling at this, and unable longer to withstand the taunts and jibes, he sprang to his feet, and said:

"Spare yourself the trouble of mourning my death. I am not dead."

The two grangers looked at him in amazement.

At last his host, gaining his breath, said:

"Who are you?"

"Jesse W. James, at your service," and with that his hands flew to his hips, and out leaped a pair of bristling revolvers.

"Oh! ow! ow! ai!" yelled the grangers, and one sprang under the bed, and another crept under the table.

"Don't be alarmed, you poor, pitiable, miserable cowards. I could kill you both, but I won't. No, I'll spare you, and to show you that I would scorn to beat you out of a breakfast, miserable as it was, here is a dollar for the meal."

Jesse flung a silver dollar down upon the table as he spoke, and left the house. He was gone for several moments before the two farmers dared emerge from under the table, and finally, when they came forth, they began to look about at each other and ask if they were really alive.

In the meanwhile Jesse was going leisurely down the road. He was in an enemy's country, weak and alone, and he knew that it would be dangerous for him to linger long after it had become known that he was alive.

Suddenly there was a rustling among the bushes.

Suspecting that it was an enemy, Jesse drew a revolver and cocked it. But it only proved to be a dog. The animal whined uneasily and came toward him sniffing the air.

"Poor fellow! have you lost your master? and are you alone hunting a friend like I?"

Jesse stooped and patted the dog's head, calling him a good fellow and making much over him. Jesse James seemed to have a sort of mesmeric influence over animals. They became his friends almost as soon as they knew him.

This animal whined and crouched at his feet, rubbing his head against him with infinite delight.

Then as the outlaw left him and went down the road, the dog whined and followed him. Dogs when they are friends are the truest, noblest friends one can have.

Who ever knew a dog that would not brave flood and fire, and dangers small and great for the man, woman or child they loved.

Jesse James thought it only a trifling act to form the acquaintance and friendship of a strange dog. He supposed that he would soon tire of him and leave him.

But as Jesse trudged on mile after mile and hour after hour, along unfrequented woods, across muddy fields and pastures, the dog kept ever at his side. Jesse did not use any further arts to keep him with him.

When he lay down to rest the dog crouched upon the ground, a watchful honest sentinel to watch over him.

"Poor Carlo, poor fellow, are you really my friend? Have you in truth come to guard over me, noble fellow?"

Jesse was tired.

He was also sleepy. In a few moments his weary eyes began to close, and he thought:

"I will not go to sleep, no, I dare not go to sleep. I will just close my eyes and rest, but I want no sleep."

He closed his eyes, and before he knew it, his consciousness slipped away.

He was asleep. How can any one wonder that he slept, for he had gone for several nights without sleep. He had been traveling, running, flying, as it were, from his pursuers night and day and was worn out.

Hours went by; the sun sank lower and lower and its last departing ray, before it disappeared for the night, fell on the face of the sleeping outlaw.

Dusk crept through the woods, and on the evening air came the tramp of feet.

The dog, which had been dozing, raised its head and growled. There was something ominous in that growl, but it did not wake Jesse James.

The animal stirred uneasily, but seeing his new master was still asleep, he seized his coat collar and shook him quite sharply, and this woke him.

Jesse started to his feet, and heard a voice saying:

"Come on along this path, and let us see if he isn't in this thicket or these woods."

"Well?"

"He must be near."

"D'you reckon the old men knew what they were talking about?"

"Of course. Jesse wasn't born to be drowned. He'll be hung!"

"Ha, ha; that's it—hung!"

Retreat was out of the question, and to Jesse James there seemed to be nothing left but to fight.

He cocked his revolver and a moment later as the first man approached he leveled it and pulled the trigger.

Only a dull click followed.

Jesse James realized now that his weapons had become wet while in the river the night before and his powder was worthless.

"Here he is!" roared the foremost of the twain springing on Jesse.

Jesse clenched with him, crying:

"Off, off, you wretch!"

But the man fought him like a demon, yelling to his companion:

"Here, come on, help me, Willis."

A second man sprang to his aid, but Jesse had a friend on whom he little counted.

The dog leaped at the throat of one of the men and in a moment had him down upon the ground.

In his weak condition, Jesse James could not cope with both of them, but the dog had disposed of one and he soon knocked the other senseless with the butt of his pistol.

"Saved, and by a strange dog," he cried.

"Noble animal, you have done what but few people would have done."

The dog had shaken the second man into insensibility, and Jesse, not wishing to kill either one of them, called him off.

"Come, noble fellow, you and I are outlaws together, and we must fly for our lives."

The dog wagged his tail in infinite pleasure, and indicated in his dumb show that he was willing to go with him anywhere.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AT BAY.

THE bandit king of America had not gone far before he heard the sound of horses' feet.

The dog stopped and wagged his tail.

"Carlo, what does it mean?"

The dog looked up in Jesse's face and wagged his tail.

There was danger near. Jesse was as good as unarmed, for his waterproof metallic cartridges had become thoroughly soaked by the water, and he could not fire a shot.

"Come here," he whispered to the dog.

The dog obeyed him, and they crawled through a rail fence and crouched down in a corner of the fence among the weeds.

"Down—down, fellow," whispered Jesse, keeping his hand on the mouth of the dog. "You must keep still. You must, sh—sh—"

The tramp of hoofs coming down the lane were nearer and nearer. It was a solitary horseman, and Jesse could have shot him with ease from where he crouched had he had any cartridges, but his cartridges were spoiled.

Soon the man was opposite them,



He rode slow and seemed on the lookout for somebody.

Now he reins in his horse and raises high in the saddle.

"Where are they?" the solitary horseman asked. "I don't see 'em anywhere. What has become of my pursuers?"

"Pursuers?" thought Jesse James. "What can he mean?"

"And where is Jesse, my brother?"

"Frank!"

He called aloud before he knew it, and Frank's loaded revolver was leveled at him, but the wary outlaw did not fire.

Jesse saw that he was recognized, and said:

"Don't shoot, Frank."

"Jesse, is it you?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here."

He rose to his feet, and the dog cleared the fence at a bound.

"There is a dog," cried Frank James. "What is he doing here? Let's shoot him."

"Hold!" cried Jesse, as Frank leveled his revolver at the dog.

"Why?"

"He's mine."

"Yours? I thought it a hound sent to betray us."

"No. That gallant fellow saved my life."

"Then I wouldn't harm him for the world."

"That you must not do."

Jesse then told his brother how the gallant dog had saved his life.

"Where have you been, Frank?"

"Hiding, fighting and running."

"It's the same old story, I suppose?"

"Yes, the same round of running, hiding and fighting. But, Jesse, what has happened to you? You look as if you had been in the river."

"I was."

"Fell in?"

"Yes, with Timberlake."

"Did you and he meet?"

"We did."

"And you didn't kill him?"

"We fell in the river, and I was almost drowned."

"Jesse, how did you escape?"

"It's too long a story to tell now. I got help on shore, or I never would have escaped. Frank have you any cartridges?"

"Yes, haven't you?"

"Yes, but they got wet."

"Pshaw—our metallic shells are water-proof."

"No, some of mine are bad, I know."

"You tried them."

"My pistol snapped and but for the dog I would have been dead or a prisoner?"

"Well, if your powder is damp it won't do to fool with them. Throw 'em away and I'll supply you."

"All right."

Jesse threw away his cartridges and Frank gave him a new supply.

"Now I am about ready for business again."

"Good. But you have no horse."

"No."

"Where is your dapple gray?"

"Dead."

"Killed?"

"Yes."

"Run to death?"

"No—shot to death."

"By whom?"

"Some of Timberlake's men."

"Jesse, your jug scheme did not kill Timberlake."

"No, but he has several scars from the cuts he got from my hand grenade."

"It worked well with us that night."

"Yes, but we are in trouble again, Frank."

"Oh, how I wish we had our horses here."

"I do, too."

"With Siroc and Jim Malone we could defy them. We could escape."

"Couldn't we defy them anyhow?"

Jesse sat down at the roadside on the ground, and began extracting the damaged cartridges from his pistols.

He wiped the revolvers dry with his handkerchief.

Frank James had never seen his brother so wholly despondent as he seemed on this night.

"What do you think of our chances, Jesse?" asked Frank.

"They are slim."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, Frank. To be plain with you, it looks to me as if we had been brought to bay."

"Well, Jesse," Frank said after a few moments' silence, "if we are brought to bay we'll make it hard for those who have run us down."

"I don't see how we are to get out of the country with every cross road guarded by Timberlake and his myrmidons."

"Won't it be a triumph for Sheriff Timberlake?"

Jesse ground his teeth in rage.

"Yes. He says he has prayed for the hour to come when he could make me his captive."

"Why you more than I?"

"It's personal."

Frank asked no more.

If he did not know Jesse's secret he evidently did not care to know it.

"Did you lose your gun, Jesse?"

"Yes."

"I picked up one," said Frank, unslinging a long, double-barreled rifle.

"Where?"

"Took it from a fellow I left at the roadside. But there is no need to go into detail. There is not much more of the night left. Suppose we be going?"

"I am ready."

"Come on; but let me walk and you ride awhile."

"Very good. I am a'most used up."

Jesse climbed into the saddle which his brother Frank had quitted.

They went along the road, traveling slowly, and pausing frequently to listen.

At daylight they paused a moment to rest, and went on.

Just as the sun was rising in the eastern heavens a farmer saw two men, one on foot and one on horseback go over the hill east of his house. The one on foot had a gun on his shoulder, and a dog was following them.

The farmer thought it rather strange, but concluded that it must be some early hunters out.

"Don't see why they hain't both er ridin', ur both er walkin'," said the farmer.

But then it was none of his business, and he had soon forgot it.

Two hours later, as the farmer was getting his horse ready to go to town, he heard a loud clatter of hoofs, and looked up to see twenty-five or thirty men riding toward him.

"Good Goll! wot do that mean?" he asked.

The man in the lead, who was no doubt in command, was none other than Timberlake.

"Good-morning!" he cried.

"Good-mawnin', sir."

"Have you seen two men pass this morning?" asked Timberlake.

"Yes."

"One on horseback?"

"Yes."

"And one on foot?"

"I did."

"The man who was walking had a gun, did he not?"

"He did, sir, an' a dog war a-follerin' ov 'em. Now I dun know anything more erbout it."

"Oh, yes, you do."

"What air it?"

"How long since they passed?"

"Ber gosh, stranger, yer got me that time."

"How long?"

"It was jist at sun up."

"At sunrise? Then it has been about two hours."

"That's it, for a fact, stranger. But say, mister, since yor been axin' uv so all-fired many questions o' me, lemme ax ye some, won't yer?"

"Go ahead."

"Who war them air fellers?"

"Humph! we must go."

"Hold on—who wuz they?"

But Timberlake, having got his information, had no more use for the farmer, and galloped away, his band of heavily armed men at his heels.

"Wall, now, I be consarned ef that be fair—'tain't fair 'tall!" growled the old farmer.

"If they have only one horse between them," said Timberlake, "they must be about run down. And now, boys, if we only keep up this chase a few hours we shall have them safe and sound."

They pushed on, and an hour later came to the top of a high hill.

Half a mile away, below them, they saw a man on a horse—a man on foot with a gun and dog—going along the road.

"There they are!" roared Timberlake. "Now let's at them!" and they went thundering down the hill. The James Boys hear them coming, and realizing that flight is impossible, they wheel about at bay.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### CONCLUSION.

"Hurrah! hurrah! we've found them, we've

found them!" roared Timberlake, as he spurred his horse down the hill.

Jesse James, who was riding, dismounted, and the bandit brothers brought the horse around between them and the enemy. This meant business, and nobody knew this any better than Timberlake. He reined in his horse.

"Boys, there is going to be fighting," he said.

"By Jehosephat, yer kin bet on that," roared old Sol Kitchen, removing his hat to scratch his bald head.

There came a little puff from the saddle over the horse's back, and old Sol leaped four feet high and roared with pain.

"What's up?" cried Dick McCabe.

"Jesse has been clippin' away at that old bald head again," said another of the posse.

But the shot was much more serious this time than on any former occasion. It had not only grazed the old bald head, but it had cut away the third finger on his left hand, for old Sol was rubbing his bald head with his fingers when the shot was fired.

"Look out, boys, for they are dead shots," said the sheriff.

A second puff of smoke and one of the men uttered a cry, placed his hand on his breast and descended from his saddle to lay at the roadside.

"Boys, dismount, this is murder!" cried Timberlake.

"They only have one gun," said Uncle George Nelson. "We might get closer."

"That one gun's a Winchester."

"It may only be a double-barreled rifle."

"Well, you had better look out," cried the sheriff. "Dismount!"

Every man had obeyed him, and from behind horses, trees, stones, stumps and hillocks they began to fire.

The dog seemed excited and barked and raved as the battle raged.

"Get nearer!" cried Timberlake.

The horse of the James Boys went down, and they lay behind the dead beast firing as rapidly as they could. Two or three of the horses of the posse were hit. Others became frightened and fled.

The dog grew furious as the balls whistled about him and filled the air with his angry yelps.

"Shoot the infernal dog!" cried one.

A bullet at last put an end to the faithful beast. He fell dead between the James Boys and the sheriff's posse.

"We've got 'em at bay," roared Timberlake as he reloaded his rifle. "This is my triumph."

"A bullet knocked off Jesse's hat."

Another knocked a pistol out of Frank's hand. His hat was also shot from his head.

"I'm hit, Jess," he cried a moment later.

"Where?"

"In the shoulder."

"Right or left?"

"Right."

"Can you use your left hand?"

"Yes."

"Fight with that."

The fight went on.

A bullet glanced across Jesse's head and he fell.

A wild shout went up from the posse, as it was supposed he had been killed, and the fight would soon be over, but he was only stunned.

He rose and fought. Again and again did the grim, determined outlaw try to kill Timberlake. He fired a dozen shots at him, but every one missed. Jesse's hand seemed to have lost its cunning that date.

"He is Satan himself!" he said, as he fired the last shot from his revolver and missed. "I don't know why I can't hit him."

Then he turned to Frank and asked for more cartridges.

"Cartridges!" cried Frank, his face growling pale. "I have none."

"What, are you out?"

"Yes."

"Great heavens! we are at their mercy!"

The firing continued, but as no shots were returned, Timberlake ordered a charge.

Jesse and Frank, both wounded a dozen times, fought stubbornly. The James Boys at bay were like lions, but they went down and were tied hard and fast.

The sun was going down, however, when the fierce struggle was over and the prisoners secured.

Timberlake's triumph was short, for that very night, Cole Younger, at the head of the band, swooped down upon the sheriff and rescued the prisoners, bearing them away to a place of safety.

[THE END.]



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